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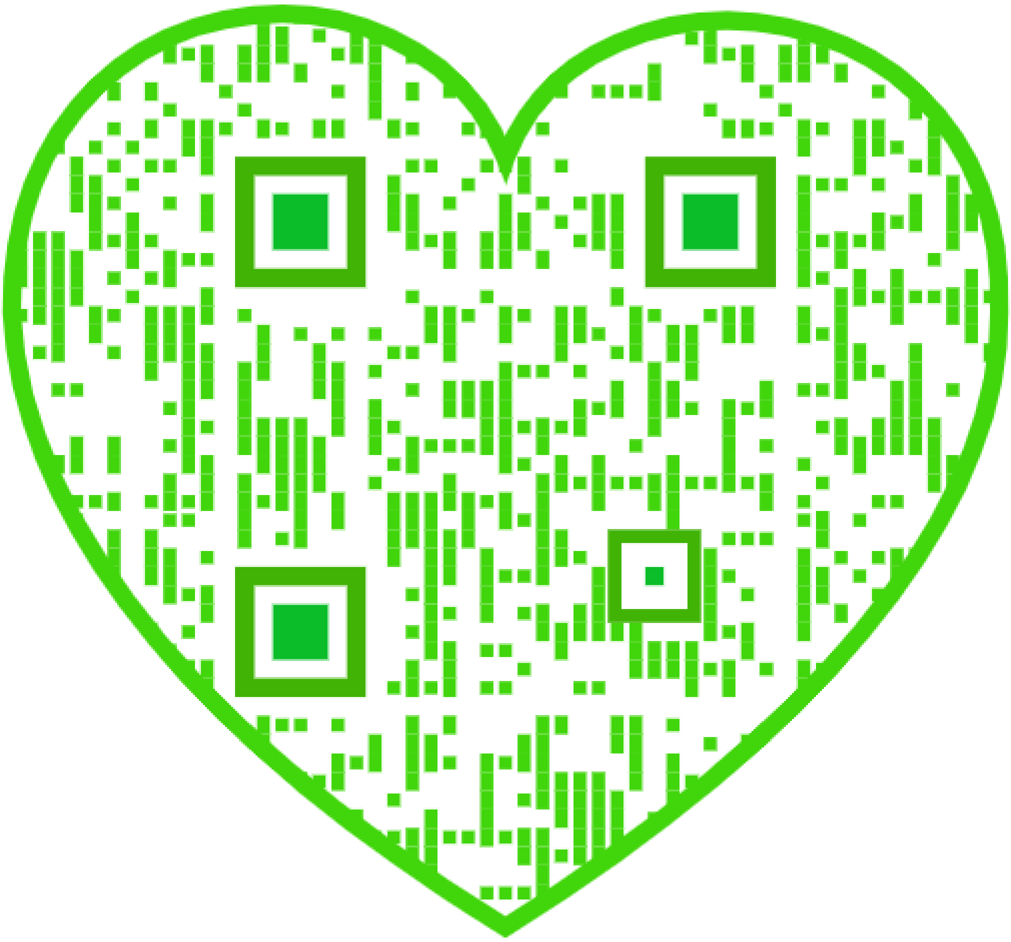

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Bird Watching

HAVE YOU SIGNED UP FOR 2025?

#My200BirdYear challenge

Bird Watching #My200 Bird Year
birdwatching.co.uk/my200

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What's your favourite migrant to look for in May?

SAVERIO GATTO/ALAMY

Ruth Miller: "Dotterel, almost an annual visitor on the Great Orme in Llandudno, and an exciting bird to find."

NATURE PHOTOGRAPHERS LTD/ALAMY

Neil Glenn: "Spotted Flycatcher – a late migrant that arrives almost unnoticed. Small, streaky, with an almost subliminal song and call."

AGAMI PHOTO AGENCY/ALAMY

David Lindo: "During May I always look skyward for the chance of a migrating Honey Buzzard. I haven't succeeded yet!"

MCPHOTO/SCHAEF/ALAMY

Amy Brewer: "I know Whitethroats arrive in April, but I love the scratchy sounds they make. Also, incredibly underrated in terms of looks."

Every year, we tell you that May is the best of all birding months, and every year, it comes up with the goods! So, while of course we hope you enjoy every bit of this issue, can I recommend that you turn straight to the 'hands-on' sections, such as Your Birding Month, #My200BirdYear, ID Challenge, and Go Birding, then get out into the field to put your knowledge to the test during this period of breeding and migration? You won't regret it. When you get a few minutes to relax, we've features such as Amy Brewer's up close encounters with a garden Sparrowhawk to enjoy, plus all the usual news, sightings, and more. And, on page 68, Neil Glenn gives a taste of what you could expect on our readers' holiday to Scilly this autumn.

Enjoy!

Matt Merritt, editor

...and the *Bird Watching* team's answers

ARTERRA PICTURE LIBRARY/ALAMY

Matt Merritt: "Black Tern – even one or two is great, but occasionally we get a flock. Glorious!"

AGAMI PHOTO AGENCY/ALAMY

Mike Weedon: "Temminck's Stint. Plain for a wader, but it makes up for it with its tiny size, quirky, creeping charisma – and scarcity."

Cover pic: Sparrowhawk
OUR WILD LIFE PHOTOGRAPHY/ALAMY

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18 May / 20 Jul

Tophill Low 29 Jun

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Get out and

GO BIRDING!

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PLUS 10 GREAT NEW GO BIRDING SITE GUIDES
The sound of SILENCE
YEAR LISTING FOR BEGINNERS
Flying START!
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Matt Merritt, *Bird Watching* editor

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YOUR BIRDING MONTH

MAY

BIRD OF THE MONTH

LITTLE TERN

The Little Tern is a real tiddler of a tern (though the similar North American Least Tern would probably beg to differ with this statement). It is even smaller than 'marsh terns' like the Black Tern. Even at a distance, you can tell that it is tiny, with its rapid wingbeats and proportionately large head. After the rare Roseate Tern (which has only 100 or so pairs), this is the UK's least numerous breeding tern, with c1,500 pairs, mainly on sandy or shingle coastal beaches, which are highly vulnerable to predation and disturbance.

In addition to its small size (and consequent proportions), the Little Tern is also easy to identify (apart from the very rare Least Tern) by its white forehead and 'supercilium' (pale line above the black eye-stripe), and particularly by its black-tipped yellow bill (like an inverse of the yellow-tipped black bill of a Sandwich Tern).

DID YOU KNOW?

The 'easiest' way to separate Little and Least Terns is the latter has a pale grey rather than white rump and tail.

Like our other breeding 'sea terns', Little Terns are summer visitors, arriving in April and May (and departing in September), and will turn up inland (in very small numbers) on passage as a treasured treat for inland patch-workers. Catch them if you can, or visit suitable coastal sites to enjoy this tiny delight.

MIKE LANE/ALAMY

FIVE BIRDS TO FIND IN MAY

The most exciting month of the year is here. Drop all alternative plans and spend as much time as possible out birdwatching. There is something special happening and you don't want to miss out. Here are five special birds which any birder would love to see this month.

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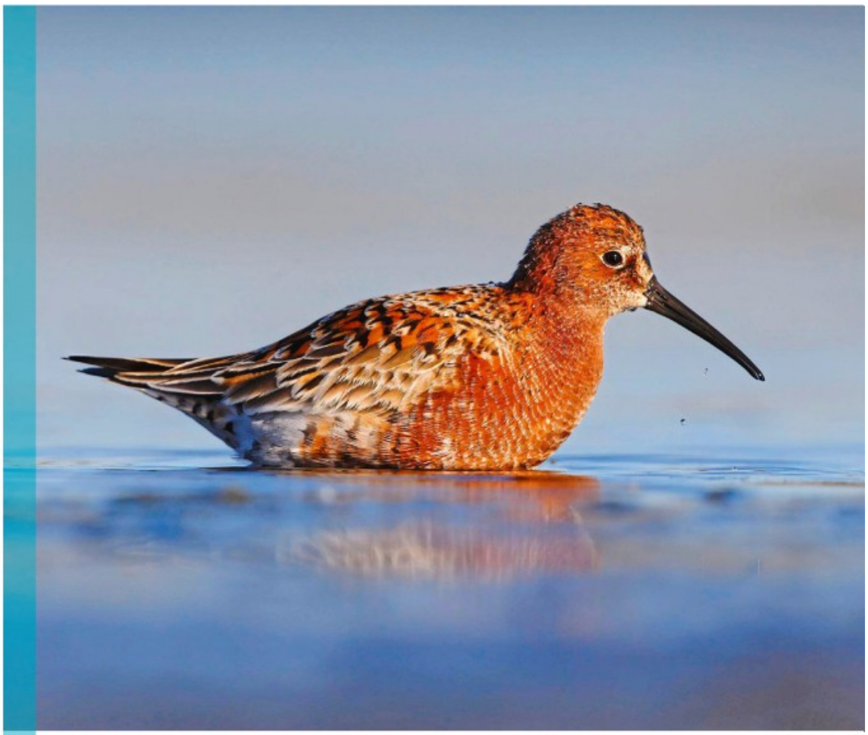
RARITY RATINGS

🐾🐾🐾	Common, widely distributed
🐾🐾	Localised – always a treat
🐾	Very scarce or rare



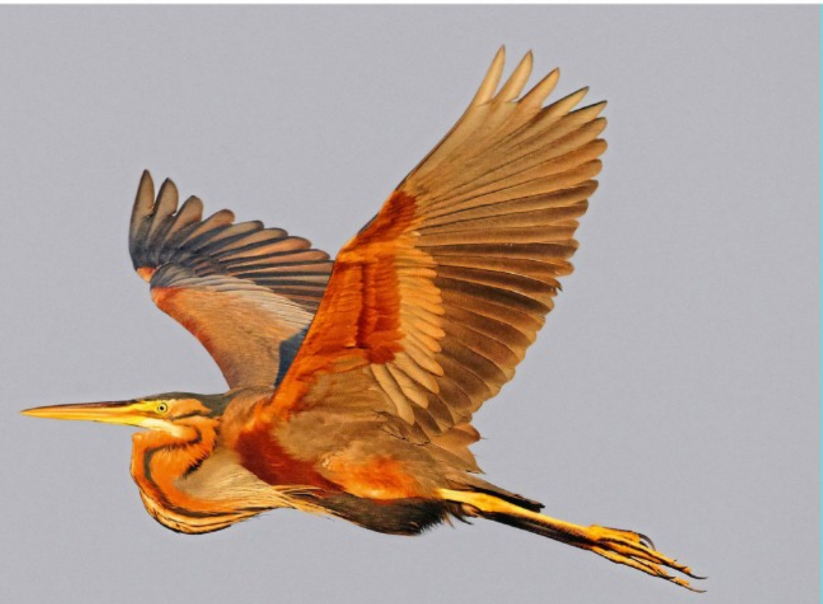
MARCO VALENTINI/ALAMY

CURLEW SANDPIPER 🐾🐾

One of our scarcer regular passage waders, Curlew Sandpipers pass through suitable sites in small numbers; the vast majority are handsome, peachy-breasted, scaly-backed juveniles, in autumn. However, like most waders, they are even more handsome in full breeding plumage. In the case of Curlew Sandpipers, this is a deep (even dark) brick red over the head, neck and underparts with golden spangled back and wings. Seeing them in immaculate breeding plumage like this in the UK is quite a rare sight, and finding one looking this way is one of the great treats of May.

PURPLE HERON 🐾

This medium-large, rakish, purple and red-brown heron is a rare but regular visitor to the UK each spring, which has occasionally bred (and perhaps will expand as a breeder in the near future). It is a shy bird and is less inclined to feed in the open than the larger, altogether more robust Grey Heron. In fact, seeing a bird in flight is often the best way of finding the rarer bird, when the trailing yellow legs and big yellow feet, and the fine bill are often obvious. Beware immature Grey Herons, which often have extensive grey areas on the head and neck, which can potentially confuse the unwary (though without 'orange' tones, they shouldn't be mistaken for the rarer bird).

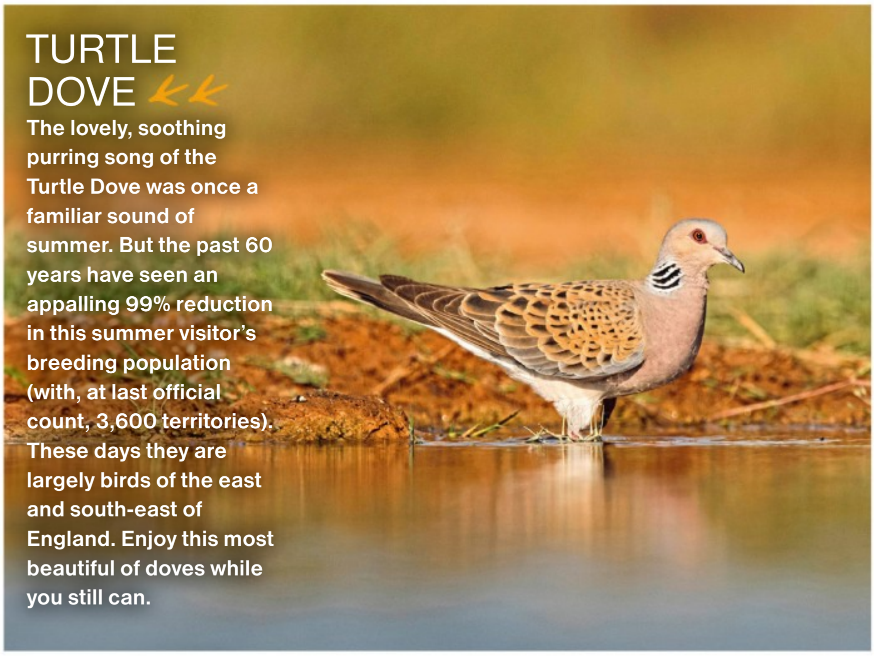


MARKUS VARESVUO, NATURE PICTURE LIBRARY/ALAMY

BERND ZOLLER, IMAGEBROKER.COM/

SPOONBILL

The handsome Spoonbill is (like so many 'long-legged wading birds') a bird on the increase in the UK, with breeding now at several sites, including last year in Cambridgeshire (for the first time since the 17th Century), as well as in Yorkshire and Norfolk etc. Despite having a reputation for sleeping for much of the time, when they are active, they are amazing-looking birds, sweeping through the shallows with that wonderful spatulate bill. Full adults with yellow breasts, yellow-tipped, 'stripy' bill and long crests on the nape, are spectacular. And other aged birds aren't bad-looking, either…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TURTLE DOVE

The lovely, soothing purring song of the Turtle Dove was once a familiar sound of summer. But the past 60 years have seen an appalling 99% reduction in this summer visitor's breeding population (with, at last official count, 3,600 territories). These days they are largely birds of the east and south-east of England. Enjoy this most beautiful of doves while you still can.

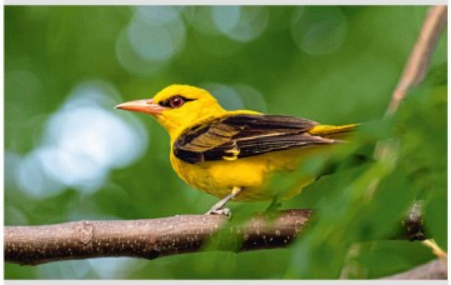
YELLOW WAGTAIL

There are a couple of common British birds which can shock unwary birdwatchers by how yellow they are, despite their names. One is the male Yellowhammer; the other is the male Yellow Wagtail, which, when it first appears in April is almost a shock to the eye! Our (mainly) British subspecies is even called *flavissima* which means 'yellowest', it being even more yellow than the Blue-headed, Grey-headed, and so on subspecies found elsewhere. Yellow Wagtails are most numerous in the east of England (largely absent from Scotland, and not widespread in Wales). They like fenland and equivalent 'arable' country, and are often found feeding around cattle, on insects attracted by the beasts, and their dung. Females are less yellow, but also green-backed.

CHRIS GOMERSALL/ALAMY

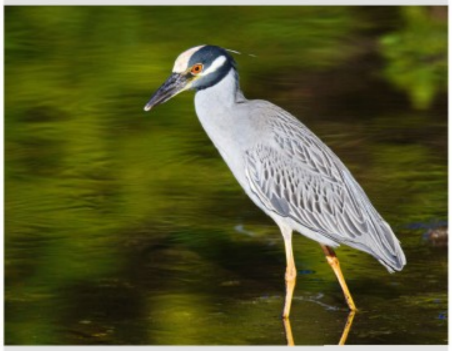
RARITY PREDICTOR

Educated guesses (based more than somewhat on the activities of May 2024), about possible extremely rare visitors.


DANIELE OCCHIATO, AGAMI PHOTO AGENCY/ALAMY

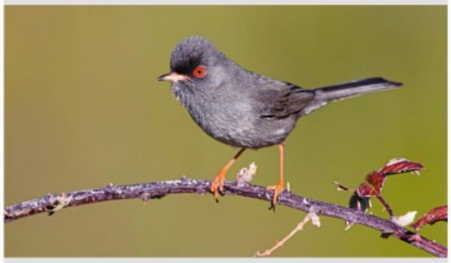
INDIAN GOLDEN ORIOLE

The single well-documented record of this Asian version of the Golden Oriole was a first-summer male on Holy Island on 21 May 2024. The black behind the eye is the first stage to successful ID.


RAY WILSON/ALAMY

YELLOW-CROWNED NIGHT HERON

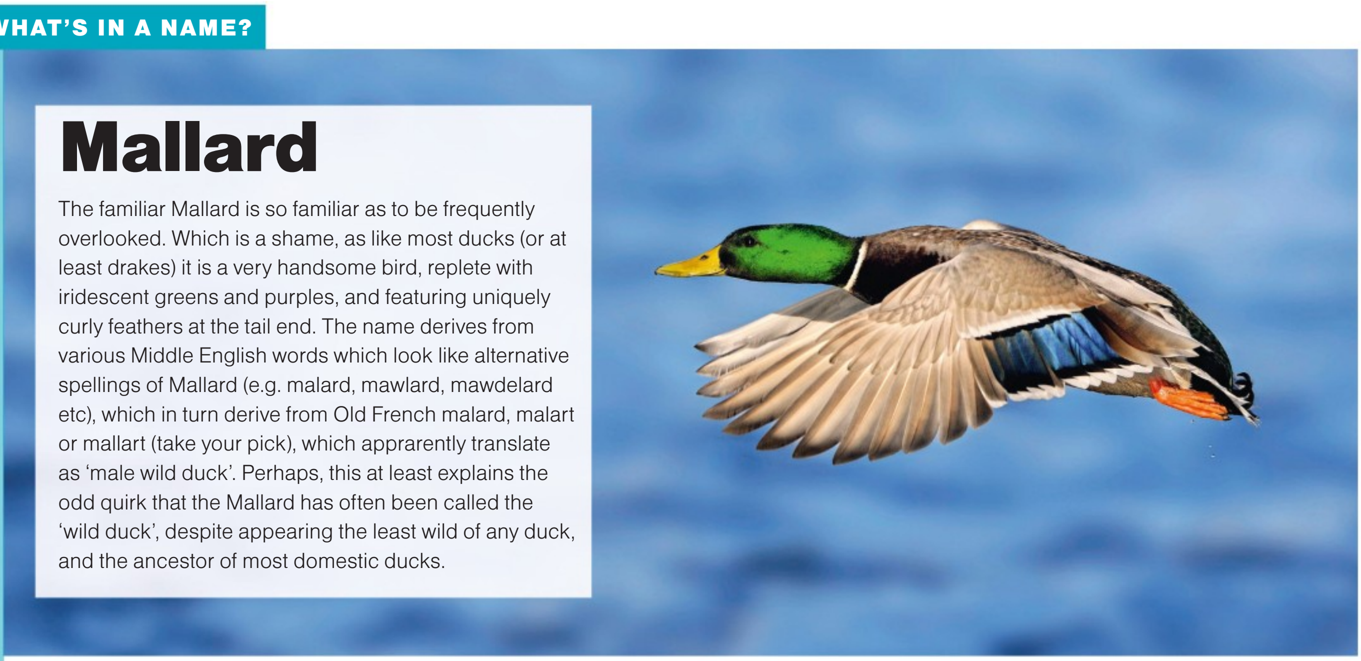
Here is a bird which is even rarer than the Indian Golden Oriole, having never been seen in the UK. Late last May, though, a long-stayer turned up in Co. Mayo, Ireland. Surely, it is a matter of time before one turns up here.


DANIELE OCCHIATO, AGAMI PHOTO AGENCY/ALAMY

MARMORA'S WARBLER

As handsome as grey birds get, the Dartford Warbler-like Marmora's Warbler is a bird of the the Mediterranean islands between the Balearics and mainland Italy (such as Corsica and Sardinia). But it has strayed north to the UK eight or so times (including singing males on a few occasions).

WHAT'S IN A NAME?



Mallard

The familiar Mallard is so familiar as to be frequently overlooked. Which is a shame, as like most ducks (or at least drakes) it is a very handsome bird, replete with iridescent greens and purples, and featuring uniquely curly feathers at the tail end. The name derives from various Middle English words which look like alternative spellings of Mallard (e.g. malard, mawlard, mawdelard etc), which in turn derive from Old French malard, malart or mallart (take your pick), which apprarently translate as 'male wild duck'. Perhaps, this at least explains the odd quirk that the Mallard has often been called the 'wild duck', despite appearing the least wild of any duck, and the ancestor of most domestic ducks.

TIM ZUROWSKI, ALL CANADA PHOTOS/ALAMY

TRACKS & SIGNS

OLIVER SMART/ALAMY

SONG THRUSH SONG: LEARN THE PATTERN, RISE EARLY

There is a myth believed by many birdwatchers that Song Thrushes are uncommon birds, these days. This is probably largely fuelled by knowledge that in the past 50 years the breeding population has halved. However, there are still perhaps 1.3 million breeding pairs in the country, which makes it still a very common bird. One reason that people think that Song Thrushes are particularly scarce is that, unlike many of our songsters, they tend to be early morning and late afternoon singers. If you wake up early enough and visit suitable woodland or parkland habitat, you are very likely to hear Song Thrush songs. Of course it helps if you know the song. It is somewhat similar in tone with the flutings of the Blackbird, but the short phrases are repeated a few times, before moving on to the next phrase and repeating that (giving the impression of a human 'song').

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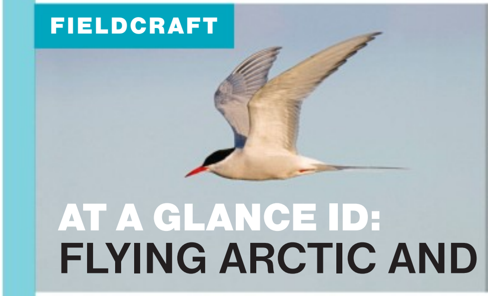

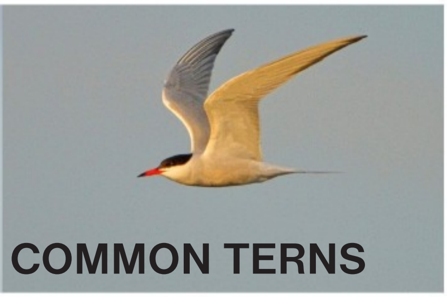

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AT A GLANCE ID: FLYING ARCTIC AND COMMON TERNS

Arctic Tern

- Relatively short neck makes head end project a short distance beyond the wings
- Bill is short and blood red, nearly always lacking a black tip
- Wings (from above) are white (looking translucent) in primaries, lacking dark wedge
- Underside of wings has clean black trailing edge to primaries
- Relatively short (but variable) tail streamers
- Usually has clean white underparts

Common Tern

- Relatively long neck makes head end project distinctly longer beyond the wings
- Bill is longer and orange-red with a black tip
- Wings (from above) have grey wedge in primaries
- Underside of wings has smudgy trailing edge to primaries
- Relatively very long (but variable) tail streamers
- May have greyish underparts

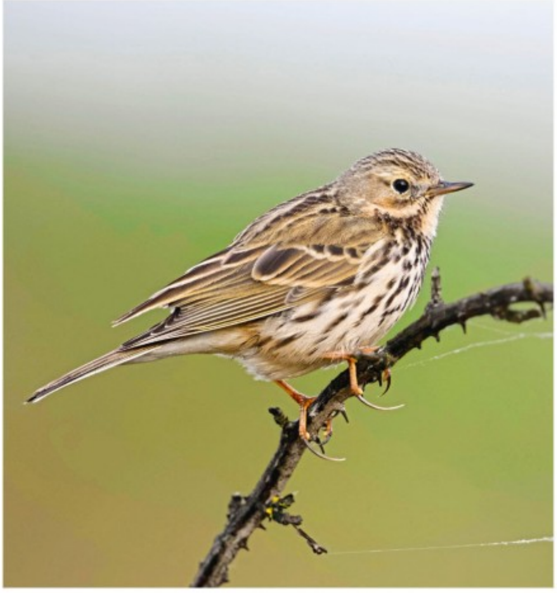
UK BREEDING GULL (NUMBER OF PAIRS)

205,000	Kittiwake
140k	Black-headed Gull
130k	Herring Gull
110,000	Lesser Black-backed Gull
49,000	Common Gull
15,000	Great Black-backed Gull
1,200	Mediterranean Gull

GLENN BARTLEY, ALL CANADA PHOTOS/ALAMY

British breeding pipits

We have three species of pipit nesting in our country. They are at first glance quite similar (particularly Meadow and Tree Pipits), but with a bit of experience they are readily separated. Here's how.



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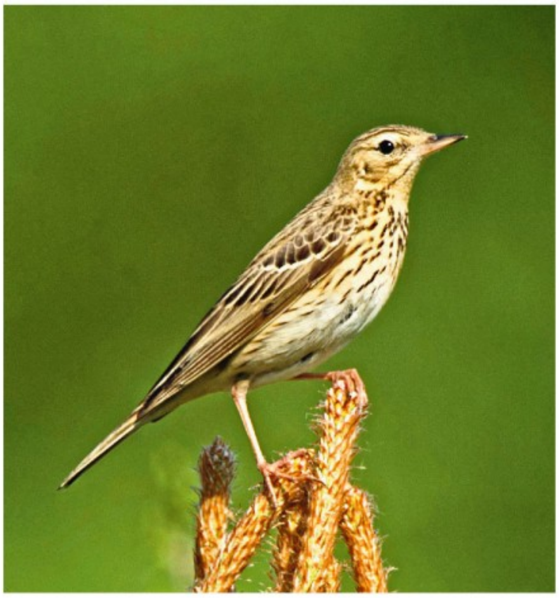


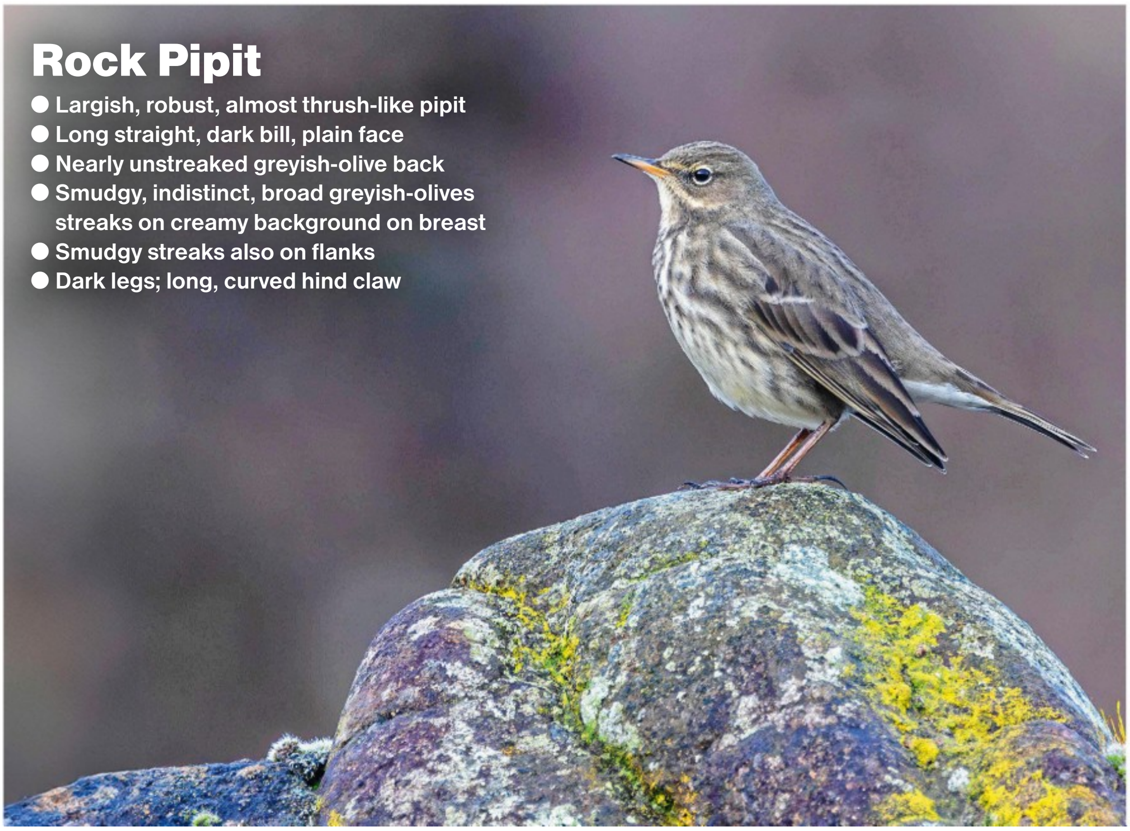
DAVID TIPLING PHOTO LIBRARY/ALAMY

Meadow Pipit

- Small, delicately built pipit
- Fine bill, plain face
- Well-streaked back
- Thrush-like black spots in streaks on creamy background on breast
- Streaks on pale flanks similar in size to those on breast
- Pinkish legs; long, curved hind claw

Tree Pipit

- Small, medium built pipit
- Bill thicker at base than Meadow's bill; dark lores/eye-stripe
- Well-streaked back
- Thrush-like black spots in streaks on yellow-ochre background on breast
- Streaks on creamy flanks finer than those on breast
- Pinkish legs; shortish, curved hind claw



JEFF HIGGOTT/ALAMY

Rock Pipit

- Largish, robust, almost thrush-like pipit
- Long straight, dark bill, plain face
- Nearly unstreaked greyish-olive back
- Smudgy, indistinct, broad greyish-olives streaks on creamy background on breast
- Smudgy streaks also on flanks
- Dark legs; long, curved hind claw

UK TIDES MAY

The times below are for high tide, when waders and wildfowl will be pushed closer to dry land...

Find the location closest to your destination and add or subtract the hours and minutes from the high tide time at London Bridge, below.

Date		Time	m	Time	m
1 Th		04:51	7.36	17:15	6.69
2 Fr		05:37	7.07	17:58	6.36
3 Sa		06:26	6.69	18:43	6.02
4 Su	☽	07:21	6.30	19:37	5.73
5 Mo		08:27	6.00	20:48	5.54
6 Tu		09:39	5.89	22:12	5.58
7 We		10:51	5.97	23:27	5.84
8 Th				12:03	6.17
9 Fr		00:28	6.15	12:58	6.37
10 Sa		01:15	6.41	13:40	6.48
11 Su		01:54	6.59	14:15	6.55
12 Mo	○	02:30	6.73	14:47	6.61
13 Tu		03:03	6.83	15:17	6.66
14 We		03:35	6.85	15:48	6.66
15 Th		04:07	6.80	16:20	6.59
16 Fr		04:41	6.69	16:54	6.44
17 Sa		05:16	6.56	17:28	6.27
18 Su		05:55	6.41	18:06	6.11
19 Mo		06:39	6.27	18:51	5.95
20 Tu	☾	07:33	6.13	19:47	5.84
21 We		08:40	6.06	20:57	5.82
22 Th		09:56	6.16	22:21	6.01
23 Fr		11:04	6.39	23:31	6.35
24 Sa				12:06	6.60
25 Su		00:31	6.69	13:04	6.76
26 Mo		01:25	6.95	13:57	6.85
27 Tu	●	02:15	7.15	14:45	6.89
28 We		03:03	7.27	15:32	6.87
29 Th		03:51	7.29	16:18	6.78
30 Fr		04:40	7.18	17:03	6.60
31 Sa		05:29	6.96	17:48	6.37

SOUTH WEST
Weston-Super-Mare (+5:05)
Barnstaple (+4:30)
Newquay (+3:32)
Falmouth (+3:30)
Plymouth (+4:05)
Torquay (+4:40)
Bournemouth (-5:09)*
Portland (+4:57)
St Peter Port (+4:53)
Swanage (-5:19)*
Portsmouth (-2:29)
Southampton (-2:53)

SOUTH EAST
Ryde (-2:29)
Brighton (-2:51)
Eastbourne (-2:48)
Dungeness (-3:05)
Dover (-2:53)
Margate (-1:52)
Herne Bay (-1:24)
Soutw-sea (-1:22)
Clacton-on-sea (-2:00)

EAST ANGLIA
Felixstowe Pier (-2:23)
Aldeburgh (-2:53)
Lowestoft (-4:23)
Cromer (+4:56)
Hunstanton (+4:44)

WALES
Colwyn Bay (-2:47)
Holyhead (-3:28)
Barmouth (-5:45)
Aberystwyth (-6:11)
Fishguard (+5:44)
Swansea (+4:42)
Milford Haven (+4:37)
Cardiff (+5:15)

NORTH WEST
Whitehaven (-2:30)
Douglas (-2:44)
Morecambe (-2:33)
Blackpool (-2:50)

NORTH EAST
Skegness (+4:29)
Grimsby (+4:13)
Bridlington (+2:58)
Whitby (+2:20)
Hartlepool (+1:59)
Blyth (+1:46)
Berwick (+0:54)

SCOTLAND
Leith (+0:58)
Dundee (+1:12)
Aberdeen (-0:18)
Fraserburgh (-1:28)
Lossiemouth (-2:00)
Wick (-2:29)
Lerwick (-2:50)
Stromness (-4:29)
Scrabster (-5:09)
Stornoway (+5:30)
Ullapool (+5:36)
Gairloch (+5:16)
Oban (+4:12)
Greenock (-1:19)
Ayr (-1:44)
Campbeltown (-1:12)
Girvan (-1:51)
Kirkcudbright Bay (-2:25)

IRELAND
Londonderry (-5:32)
Belfast (-2:47)
Donegal (+4:20)

*Approximate times due to large variance between the month's neap and spring tides. All times are GMT.

Beyond Birdwatching

James Lowen discovers the month's other wildlife...

MOTH OF THE MONTH

ALL IMAGES BY JAMES LOWEN

Sitting with its forelegs outstretched and holding its boldly marked wings in a tent shape, the first generation of **Swallow Prominent** flies in spring. Widespread and common, it is likely to grace moth traps anywhere within flying distance of poplars or sallows.

BUG

Ceremonial headgear

Thanks to a pointed head that explains its initially curious name, **Bishop's Mitre Shieldbug** readily attracts attention. This attractively striped, spring-flying insect favours dry, tall grasslands and can be found patchily over central and southern Britain.

PLANT

Evening scent

Growing commonly on arable fields, verges and waste ground over much of the country, the five white petals of **White Campion** flowers swiftly catch the eye. Although pleasing to look at, they are best experienced in the evening when the blooms issue a sweet scent designed to coax insects into providing pollination services.

AMPHIBIAN

Dusk churrer

If you live anywhere near a **Natterjack Toad** colony – and, granted, there aren't very many of them left in Britain, for this is our rarest native amphibian – May is a fabulous month to visit. Choose a warm, moist evening then locate a likely-looking shallow pool. As darkness falls, males give a remarkable churring, or almost rattling, call that can be heard fully one mile away.

SPIDER

Ambush predator

An abundant spider occurring almost throughout Britain, *Xysticus cristatus* (sadly known only by its scientific name) is a personal spring favourite. Look for it at ground level or on low vegetation, where it waits, crab-like, for small invertebrates to blunder between its widely spread forelegs. The four members of the genus *Xysticus* can be told apart only by their genitalia – but the genus is readily recognisable, and this is by far the most likely species you will encounter.

FLY

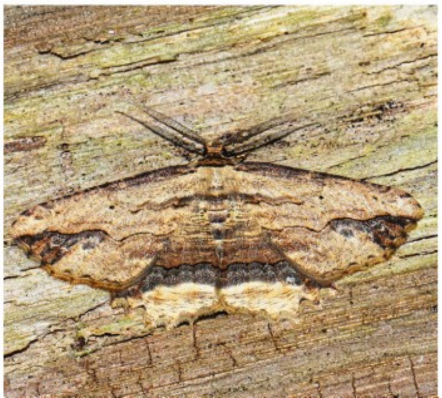
Strong thighs?

On a small, slender insect, the remarkably chunky 'thighs' after which **Thick-legged Hoverfly** is named demand an evolutionary explanation. Both males and females have these thickened hindlegs, which are thought to represent a form of mimicry. The idea is that these legs have evolved to help the flies look like bees, many of which have rear legs modified to carry pollen. Indeed, it is conjectured that the orange spot on the hoverfly's legs resembles a pollen basket. This fly is also known as Compost Hoverfly, because its larvae develop in damp decaying matter – such as compost heaps.

MOTH

Camouflage king?

Evolution is also at play in this striking spring-flying moth. Many moths seek to evade predators through camouflage. The **Waved Umber**'s patterning theoretically enables it to hide in plain sight – as long as it can find a suitable woody substrate on which to rest – and, if not, the lines and stripes serve to break up its shape.



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Weedon's World

Earlier in spring, Mike found himself sucked into the world of charismatic owls, including a very special one

Everyone loves owls. OK, not everyone. A million years ago, I had a school friend called Trevor Saint whose mother had such a 'fear' of owls that a few pages of the family's Hamlyn Guide to Birds of Britain and Europe were permanently folded in half just in case Mrs Saint caught a glimpse of an owl. And, I accept that there are superstitions around the World which make people afraid of owls. I guess it is a mix of owls being nocturnal, and so often poorly seen and 'ghostly', plus the almost human-like face, with forward-facing eyes...

But we are all birdwatchers here, and surely it is safe to say we all love owls? And a large part of that is their pleasing appearance, with the almost cat-like face and their big-headed, rounded form, as well as their often delightfully floaty and buoyant flight style.

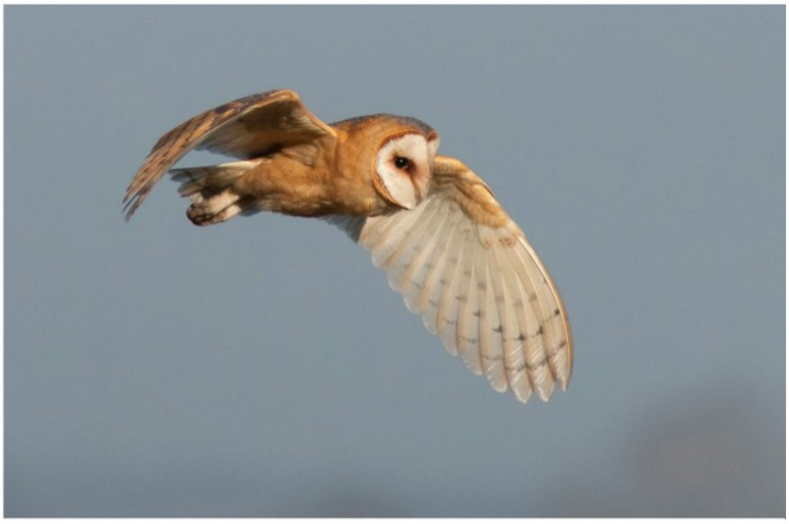
I have mentioned before how various sites around my adopted home city of Peterborough have become renowned for their owls. In fact, I think more birders (and particularly photographers) visit sites like Deeping Lakes LWT or Eldernell (part of the Nene Washes) for a spot of owling than to see any other of their famous (breeding or wintering) birds, such as Cranes, Marsh Harriers, or Bitterns.

Deeping Lakes has roosting Long-eared Owls and a pair of elusive Little Owls, plus the odd Barn Owl. Eldernell also has roosting Long-eared Owl, hunting Short-eared and Barn Owls and perhaps the UK's most photographed Tawny Owl (sitting in its hollow). Last year, Short-eared Owls in some areas near to home stayed until early summer, leading to speculation that they may even be on the brink of following Stonechat and Goosander to becoming recently colonising regular breeders in north Cambs and/or south Lincs.

This year, the area near the River Welland between Deeping Lakes (Deeping St James) and Spalding has become very popular with photographers (including, I confess, me) for its 'day-flying' Short-eared Owls and Barn Owls. Photographers have even got to know the particular individual owls – it is remarkable how variable Shorties can be, from pale, buffy birds to pretty dark ones. One SeO even appears to have only one properly functioning eye – the other looks (in most lights) to be almost wholly yellow, with the golden iris seemingly obscuring the pupil. But it seems that One-eye can hunt remarkably well and appears perfectly healthy, so presumably either it is not as visually impaired as you may think, or maybe its excellent hearing makes up for its imperfect stereo vision.

> "AN ENCOUNTER WITH A REGULAR *ALBA* BARN OWL IS LIKE WATCHING A PALE IMITATION"

Many photographers put excellent photos of 'our' owls on social media and my friend Will B likes to keep an eye on such pages. Partly to find out where the best potential subjects are hanging out; partly to see if we birders are missing out on something scarce or rare – in this way, he has 'found' Black Redstart and even Arctic Redpoll lurking on the internet in recent years. In early March, Will spotted a photo on the Lincolnshire Birding Facebook pages showing a Barn Owl. On closer inspection, this owl looked like it had a good hint of dark-breasted Barn Owl about it. So, he contacted the photographer and asked for its locality: an area near Bourne which, as luck would have it, was in my beloved Peterborough Bird Club recording area… So, the next day, he went to check out the site to see if the owl really appeared to be the 'real thing': a Barn Owl of the central and eastern European subspecies *guttata*.



MIKE WEEDON

Above
Dark-breasted Barn Owl (subspecies *guttata*), Bourne, Lincolnshire, 20 March 2025

OK, you may be thinking, fair enough, but dark-breasted Barn Owls seem fairly common, and are always being reported. No big deal. Yes big deal! Genuine *guttata* Barn Owls are actually really rare. In fact, there have only been a baker's dozen accepted UK records of this taxon, ever. This would make this owl perhaps the rarest bird we have ever had in the PBC area. Of course, it is 'just a subspecies', so not something you can 'tick'. But, it would be rude not to check it out. I went that evening. In the flesh, it is startling, with a real depth of orange-buff down to the undertail coverts (and buffy legs). The facial disc has the whitest feathering, and this is smudged with black make-up, like a goth dressed as an owl for Halloween. The upperparts are also very striking, with a purple-blue look on the abundant darker spots – much more than a regular Barn Owl. In fact, having watched the *guttata* for hours, an encounter with a regular *alba* Barn Owl is like watching a pale imitation…

The dark-breasted owl's behaviour also seems subtly different from our 'local' Barn Owls – frequently sitting on the top of small 'Christmas trees', to scan the ground below, by slowly rotating its head, a bit like a shrike, or how I imagine a Hawk Owl would behave. It really is a very special bird. I love it. But, then, everyone would.

Mike Weedon is a lover of all wildlife, a local bird 'year lister', and a keen photographer, around his home city of Peterborough, where he lives with his wife, Jo, their children, Jasmine and Eddie having fled the nest. You can see his photos at: **weedworld.blogspot.com**

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MAKE YOUR BIRDING COUNT

BREEDING

Keeping tabs on rare breeders

You can help threatened birds and species just about to colonise the UK, writes Jon Carter…

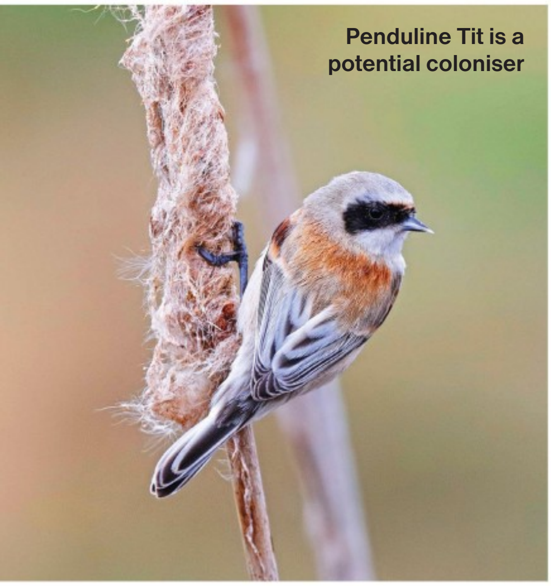
Black-necked Grebe

WILFRED MARISSEN/ALAMY

At the time of writing, the breeding season is just getting underway and the first of our summer migrants are flooding in from near and far. As I sit here contemplating the season ahead, my thoughts turn to those species which may be on the cusp of colonisation, along with those in steep decline.

Thanks to a healthy network of high-quality nature reserves and other managed landscapes across the UK, many of the birds with smaller breeding populations are able to find relatively undisturbed locations to raise their precious young.

But not all scarce breeders choose to nest in the cosy, secure confines of a protected area and may therefore go undetected and be vulnerable to a range of threats.


Penduline Tit is a potential coloniser

MICHAEL MCKEE/ALAMY

This is a time of year when birders are extremely active, with lots of people enjoying the longer days and improved weather (fingers crossed!), and many of us are avidly engaged in BTO Breeding Bird Surveys and the like.

For most of us, the likelihood of finding a rare nesting species is low, but not out of the question. But what should we do if we are fortunate enough to stumble across a rare bird, attempting to breed in a 'new' area? Thankfully, there are ways to share your news, confidentially and effectively.

Firstly, contact your local bird recorder; please do not share the news on any websites or social media platforms! Your local recorder will not only ensure that any required protections are put in place wherever possible, but also that appropriate landowners are informed. They will also notify the Rare Breeding Birds Panel (RBBP).

This group was set up in 1972 to effectively chart and archive all rare breeding birds in the UK, allowing ornithologists to monitor changes in distribution and population.

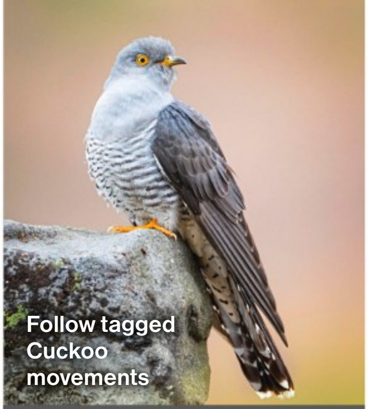
You may be wondering just what qualifies as a 'rare breeding bird'? Simply put, any species with fewer than 2,000 pairs attempting to nest across the whole of the UK is in the frame. These can include regular nesters such as Black-necked Grebe, infrequent breeders such as Bee-eater and potential colonisers such as Penduline Tit. A full list of species can be found on the RBBP website at **www.rbbp.org.uk**

By submitting your records, you can help paint a more thorough picture of the state of some of our most vulnerable birds, as well as helping chart the increase of once-rare breeders as they successfully colonise our shores.

DID YOU KNOW?

An Oystercatcher which was caught by the Wash Wader Research Group in early March 2025, had been originally ringed as an adult 43 years ago. It is thought to be the oldest known Oystercatcher in the world!

Find out more on the RBBP website at www. rbbp.org.uk



Follow tagged Cuckoo movements

DREW BUCKLEY/ALAMY

Here come the Cuckoos!

If you're lucky, you may have heard your first Cuckoo of the year by now. Most arrive in late April and early May, heading to favoured breeding areas. While there are far fewer to be heard these days, they are still widespread enough to found by most birders, either on territory or as passing migrants.

Thanks to the BTO's long-running Cuckoo tagging project we now understand far more about these remarkable birds. Prior to the launch of the project in 2011 there was just one recovery of a UK-ringed Cuckoo, from Cameroon in January 1930! The assumption was that this was probably where our Cuckoos spent their winters, but thanks to our tagging project, we know that the reality is far more complex.

British Cuckoos migrate to and from the Congo basin, with some taking a western route, via Spain, while others favour an eastern route, via Italy or Greece. We have also discovered that birds using the Spanish route came from those parts of the UK where the species is seeing the greatest drop in numbers.

By comparing survival rates of tagged birds with the environmental conditions recorded along the migration flyway, for birds breeding in parts of the UK where the population is declining and those where it is stable or increasing, we will hopefully further understand the causes of decline.

Watch the progress of the satellite tagged Cuckoos on our interactive map and help fund the project at www.bto.org/cuckoos

Grumpy Old Birder

Bird races, even against yourself, will help you find more birds, writes Bo Beolens…

Many birders will take part in a 'bird race'; chasing around the country from dawn to dusk at the beginning of May. I think that the record in my county is 143 birds seen in such a day… sometimes it takes me a whole year to reach that! My 'big day' isn't in competition with others, I can't see the point, especially when I have zero chance of winning. Mostly, I set out on New Year's Day to see how many birds I can get under my belt by sunset. Back in the previous century, my target was 100 birds, but I never quite made it. My best bet was the Isle of Sheppey… it has a number of wetlands, a river front, seaside, salt marsh, a few tiny areas of woodland and a lot of farm land. Its geographical situation makes it ideal for watching winter raptors.

Any time of year, it probably has the densest population of Marsh Harriers in the UK. Come winter, Short-eared Owls come down from the high moorlands, swapping frozen landscapes for soft southern climes… it's not unusual to have dozens of owls demolishing the local Short-tailed Vole population, in competition with resident Barn Owls and visiting Hen Harriers. If you are lucky, you can find Long-eared Owl roosts or see a Little Owl atop a farm shed. There are increasing numbers of Buzzards, Merlins whipping by at weed-top height like fighter pilots in training, and Peregrines given away by the sudden rise of hundreds of Golden Plovers or skittish winter geese. Some winters, you might even luck upon a Rough-legged Buzzard posing like an eagle on a hay bale.

Several large farms have 'shoots' with released Red-legged Partridges and Pheasants thick on the ground. While I see nothing but bad karma in the pastime, the preparation of feeding stations and shores of crops left as cover are often alive with sparrows, buntings and finches. The island has never lost its Corn Buntings and its crops feed thousands of geese.

So, the bountiful isle would usually get me to the nineties with waders and wildfowl, raptors and occasional rarities. Sadly, over the past few years I've had much lower figures. What were crisp, sunny Januarys in the 1990s are now more often sad and soggy. Mild weather elsewhere obviates the necessity to pile down south in search of prey. This year it wasn't until mid-February that a Great Spotted Woodpecker visited my feeders to bring up the 'ton'.

Back at the last year of the 20th Century I did try my hand at bird racing. Myself and two friends measured out a prescribed 'big sit' circle near the top of another Kent hotspot – Northward Hill, an RSPB reserve with an ancient heronry, grown smaller now, but sporting several different species. From our perch we could see across the north Kent marshes, over the Thames to Essex's oil refineries. The struggle up the hill nearly did for me, but I had all day to rest up and watch. From the wood behind birds sang. Waders and reed species popped up to view and farmland species kept us going all day, from Nightingale dawn to Woodpigeon's eve. By the time I staggered back down the hill to my car (rather lighter without several kilos of snacks and sandwiches) we had ticked 77 species without moving out of the 17-foot diameter circle. For all I know, the record may stand.

But finally, a cautionary tale: My son's Buckinghamshire bird race almost ended disastrously when helicopter floodlights and armed police surrounded his group as they scoured woods for night-birds. Telescopes misidentified as guns closing in on Chequers!

Bo Beolens runs **fatbirder.com** and other websites. He has written a number of books.

Feed laid for gamebirds such as Red-legged Partridge also attracts other species

BLICKWINKEL/ALAMY

GET IN TOUCH

Have you got anything to add to Bo's comments? Email us at birdwatching@bauermedia.co.uk

Bird Watching #My 200 Bird Year

birdwatching.co.uk/my200

SET A TARGET OF SEEING 200 BIRDS IN ONE YEAR!

Yellowhammer

CAROLINE EASTWOOD/ALAMY

Sign up to #My200BirdYear

May is a month in which your list should really take off, writes **David Callahan…**

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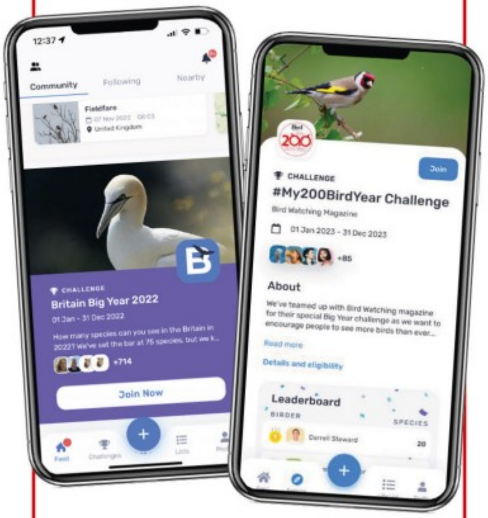
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Bird Watching Magazine

01 Jan 2023 - 31 Dec 2023

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Join

About

We've teamed up with Bird Watching magazine for their special Big Year challenge as we want to encourage people to see more birds than ever...

Read more

Details and eligibility

Leaderboard

BIRDER	SPECIES
Darrell Steward	20

You can track your progress in #My200BirdYear by joining us on the Birda app, as featured in our recent Gear Guide. Download the app, sign up for the #My200BirdYear challenge, and log your sightings as you make them. While you're at it, Birda's monthly and geographically-based challenges are a great way of motivating yourself towards the bigger target, too, and by interacting with other users you can develop your ID skills.

BIRDA

THE DARLING BIRDS OF MAY

May is arguably the busiest month of spring migration, with our resident species already feeding broods and some even gearing up for a second round of reproduction. Regular migrants will all be in by the month's end and getting on with displaying and nest building, while there's always the chance of a lost scarcity or rarity, whether in national terms or in the context of your local patch.

And with all the birds in fresh breeding finery, there's no more exciting time to get out into the field. This is also the time where you can invest your time and emotions in the soap operas of breeding, unfolding in daily detail.

YOUR LOCAL PATCH

As they get in the swing of the nesting season, you'll see your resident birds and summer visitors displaying, carrying nest materials and food for their young. Each pair of songbirds speeds through their lifecycle on fast forward, sometimes raising two or three broods a year. By all means watch them regularly, but keep your distance to avoid disturbing them.

Any UK breeding Black-necked Grebe will be in its summer garb

KIT DAY/ALAMY

Corn Bunting

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Gulls and terns mostly breed colonially and will be at their busiest and most vociferous, with fluffy chicks demanding to be fed, following their parents around and uttering their plaintive begging calls.

Heronries will already be ejecting their juveniles and the recently expanding populations of Little, Great and Cattle Egrets and Spoonbill will also be providing drama in select places. The majority of waders will have passed through in April, but if you have any areas of marsh or muddy water edges on your patch, there's still the chance of a wandering latecomer.

Even small patches of trees or woodland can attract species more accustomed to ancient forests, such as Redstart, Wood Warbler and Pied and Spotted Flycatcher, on passage. Forested areas can hold roding Woodcock – visit at dusk for the best chance of seeing its croaking silhouette above favoured treelines, and stay later to hear the churring of Nightjars, if you're lucky enough to have a pair or two locally.

The really lucky patch worker may even find a Honey Buzzard, one of our rarest and latest migrant breeders. Perhaps no

Honey Buzzard

NATURE PHOTOGRAPHERS LTD/ALAMY

Tree Sparrows will be tending to youngsters

NATURE PICTURE LIBRARY/ALAMY

more than 50 pairs of this wasp and bee specialist feeder breed in woodlands around the country. Keep any location you discover offline to avoid disturbance. Otherwise check the news services to see which official raptor watchpoints have the species on view.

May hedgerows and reedbeds will be alive with a succession of songs from before dawn to after dusk, with a little respite during the hottest part of the day. In the countryside, listen out for high-flying Sky Larks, parachuting Meadow Pipits, buzzing Corn Buntings, Yellowhammers' whining feedback and Yellow Wagtails whistling – sometimes they all seem to merge into one but the practised ear can separate them.

A particularly useful habit to get into is mapping all the territories on your patch by recording singing males or birds exhibiting breeding behaviour, à la David Lack in the classic Life of the Robin. Over the years, these records can build into an intimate knowledge of your local birds, helping you map changes in their populations and nesting locations.

YOUR GARDEN

Hopefully, you'll have cleaned your nest boxes and feeders over winter and some species will have taken advantage of the social housing you've provided. Great and Blue Tits will be squeezing up to 20 eggs inside their nests – and sometimes they'll ignore the fancy boxes and head straight for a pipe outlet or the open top of a street sign. Not all the chicks will survive, sadly, but with a pair potentially producing 40 to 60 chicks in one season, the odds are in favour of many of them.

House Sparrows will also be furiously busy around the gutters and spaces in bricks where they are raising their young. If you live further north, you may be lucky enough to host a few fast-declining Tree Sparrows – a species which is just as urban in parts of Eurasia but seems to lose out competing with its familiar relative. In the Midlands or South East you may be fortunate enough to know the whereabouts of a pair of Black Redstarts, perhaps our most urban scarcity. This sleek and dark chat also nests under rafters and eaves but is far more secretive once on the nest.

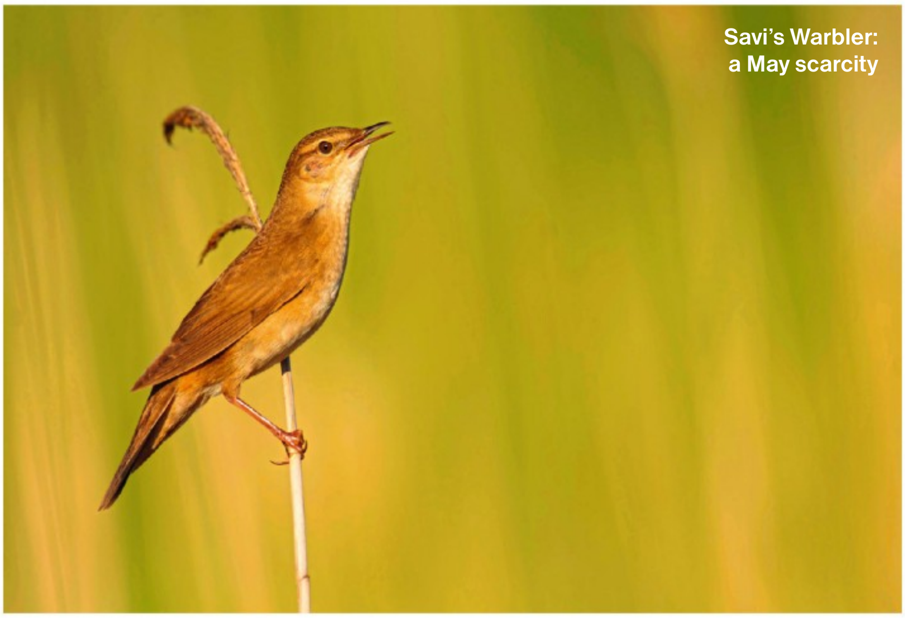
You can continue to feed birds in spring and summer, but avoid putting bread and kitchen scraps out. As the season warms, dishes of fresh water can be particularly appreciated – and keep your bird bath topped up, too.

SPECIES OF THE MONTH: RING OUZEL

For lowland birders, it's always an event when this powerful-looking thrush turns up without warning one morning. And for those in higher elevations, Ring Ouzel is a true herald of spring.

Ring Ouzel

CARL DAY/ALAMY


Savi's Warbler: a May scarcity

BLICKWINKEL/ALAMY

Like a Blackbird on steroids, but with a striking white bib and wing panel (off-white in the browner female), it is slightly smaller on average than its familiar lowland cousin but often adopts a more robust, erect posture, reminiscent of Mistle Thrush.

We all have a chance to see this mysterious species in May. Lowland birders scan areas of mown grass surrounded by scrub, with some sites – even some favoured urban parks – producing several birds each year. Upland and highland birders can be enthralled by the species' entire lifecycle by observing a territory in a gorge or quarry. The stone walls and slopes provide the ideal reflective surface to amplify its simple, piercing song, which resembles that of Song Thrush but is harsher and more minimal.

Not all is well in the Ring Ouzel's world: it has been Red-Listed by conservationists, like many other high-altitude specialists, since 2002, owing to the severe declines in its UK population owing to a complex web of habitat changes exacerbated by climate change. Its numbers and range have halved since the 1960s – like most UK bird species – and about 7,300 pairs remain, although its European population has remained stable. Your records of Ring Ouzel will help monitor its numbers and, in a small way, contribute to its conservation. Birders in the same uplands will also be looking out for Whinchat and Wheatear in the same habitats. On territory, listen for their

harsh, buzzing songs – kind of halfway between Robin and Black Redstart – as they are rarely heard in the lowlands on migration.

OTHER THINGS TO LOOK OUT FOR IN MAY

May is probably the best month other than October for producing a stupendous rarity. There won't be many but keep an eye on the news services if you want to bag yourself a 'lifer' during the month.

May is also a great month in which to practise 'vis-migging'. A colloquial term referring the observation of visible migration, this is a fantastic way of monitoring bird numbers and developing field birding skills – it's a true test of your knowledge of the different calls and the nuances of flight style. If you're new to this kind of birding, perhaps accompany an older hand for the first few hours of daylight when more birds are on the move. If you find the right vantage point at the right time – usually on a headland or hilltop close to a valley or river migration corridor with a southerly or easterly breeze – the spectacle of flocks of common finches, pipits, larks,

Be vigilant in your search for Dotterel

SAVERIO GATTO/ALAMY

You may espy a Pied Flycatcher on pasage

LISA GEOGHEGAN/ALAMY

buntings and thrushes can be awe-inspiring. There's always the possibility of something scarce or out-of-place like Hawfinch, Wood Lark or Bearded Tit to keep you keen – almost anything can pass through. Make sure you log your tallies with the BTO or on eBird – they really can inform the scientific record.

A ploughed field near the coast stands a chance of hosting a small flock or 'trip' of Dotterel. This gender role-reversed upland wader usually turns up in the same place every year but can wander. Large arable fields in Kent or Norfolk can be good, while Pendle Hill in Lancashire is legendary for this species. If you miss it on passage then you'll have to go to the Scottish Highlands – Cairngorm is the most accessible site.

While Black-tailed Godwit seems very common on the coast in winter, very few stay to breed – and 'our' birds belong to two different subspecies: up to 50 pairs of the subspecies *limosa* pairs breed on and off in East Anglia, mostly on the Nene Washes RPSB, while a very few pairs of the even rarer *islandica* birds nest only in the northern Scottish isles.

Another scarce breeder to look out for is Black-necked Grebe. Try Woolston Eyes, Cheshire, Hilfield Park Reservoir, Hertfordshire, St Aidan's RSPB, West Yorkshire, or Bemersyde Moss, Borders to see this species on breeding territory.

Most birders with access to the coast or a large body of open water are expectant for the arrival of Black Terns and Little Gulls. This sometimes happens in large numbers – but sometimes not at all. Their passage is mostly in eastern areas and among the better sites are the Lea Valley in London, Essex and Hertfordshire, the outer River Thames, Theale Gravel Pits, Berkshire, Wigan Flashes, Greater Manchester and Hornsea Mere, East Yorkshire. Despite the sometimes large numbers involved and the seeming surfeit of appropriate habitat, neither species attempts to breed very often.

MOPPING UP IN MAY

If you're amassing a year list you'll need to try to see all our summer migrants, including the scarce ones, as they arrive. May is the month for 'mopping up' those you didn't get in April and visiting known sites for scarcer species such as Bittern, Honey Buzzard and Savi's Warbler.

Try to record all your sightings via eBird or Birdtrack – and remember to put the word out promptly if you find anything good!

So, what are you waiting for? Sign up at birdwatching.co.uk/my200 and join the thousands already rising to the challenge.

Jewels of the Lea Valley

30-minute birder **Amanda Tuke** discovers winter and spring delights in North London and Hertfordshire

I've always found returning again and again to local patches hugely rewarding, but, at the start of 2025, I resolved to intersperse patching with new sites in or close to London. The Lea Valley seemed a great place to start, with its necklace of jewel-like wetlands and open water alongside the river, as it runs from its source in Hertfordshire through north-east London and on to the Thames.

I'm sure all London birders are familiar with the London Wildlife Trusts's flagship reserve, Walthamstow Wetlands, on the east side of the Lea. Handily close to Tottenham Hale station, there's plenty there for half a day's birding at least. I love this reserve – it was where I started to birdwatch again in earnest – but the main site south of Ferry Lane can get very busy. And having made the effort to get here, you'll miss out if you don't venture to the north of the reserve. And this is a good place to start exploring the upper Lea Valley,

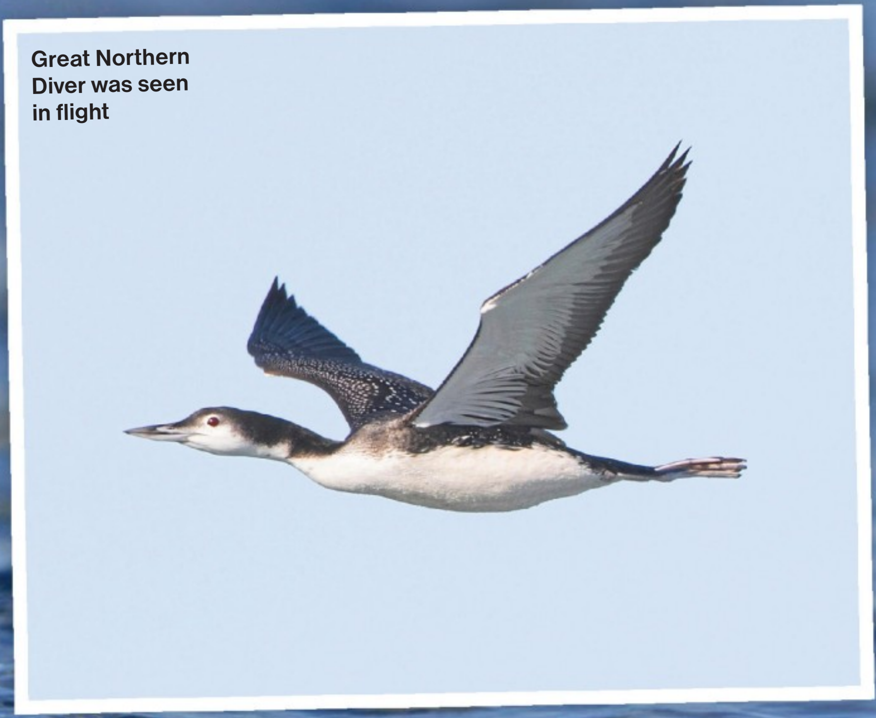
One winter morning, I emerge from the underground at Tottenham Hale, and walk through the icy fog lingering from the night before to the Wetlands. Ignoring the main reserve entrance, I turn left past Ferry Boat Inn towards a cluster of reservoirs. A trio of Black-necked Grebes have been seen here over the past few weeks. It would be rude not to try and find them, when they've been so obliging.

The fog is just beginning to clear when I reach the path alongside Lower Maynard Reservoir and then I bump into another birder who tells me the grebes are on the next reservoir, Lockwood. I climb up Lockwood's banked edge and gasp as icy wind hits me full in the face. Using my scope clearly won't work today, so I cross my fingers the birds are near the reservoir edge and set off anti-clockwise, scanning the choppy water regularly.

At a shallow inlet are three birds diving four or five metres from the concrete bank. They're immediately identifiable as Black-necked Grebes in their winter get-up of smudgy

Black-necked Grebe in winter plumage

PAUL R. STERRY, NATURE PHOTOGRAPHERS LTD/ALAMY


Great Northern Diver was seen in flight

AGAMI PHOTO AGENCY/ALAMY

Goldeneye

HUGH HARROP/ALAMY

monotone and with vivid tangerine-coloured eyes, despite my streaming eyes. They'd be hard to confuse with Little Grebes. While a similar size, the eyes are distinctive, they hold their necks more erect, and their bodies are streamlined on the water compared with the Little Grebe chunky hovercraft shape.

Back at Tottenham Hale a few weeks later, I take the Hertford East train one stop up the Lea Valley to Ponder's Lane. It's still single-figure cold but it's brighter today and the sky is a heart-clutching Forget-me-not blue. I follow the Lea Valley Road which separates adjoining reservoirs to reach the King George V entrance. I'm still struggling with the clunky gate chain and combination padlock with numb fingers when Gary from Hertfordshire arrives. With rather more patience and strength than I have, he gets the padlock open. We've never met before, so go through that delicate etiquette of working out whether we'd both be happy to bird with company. And we would.

The King George V has two basins, north and south, bounded on the east side by the Lea. The site has impressive bird records, and this week that includes five birds I don't have on my

➤

Don't forget to try these…

Five less visited birding sites in the upper Lea Valley within easy access by rail

London Wildlife Trust's Maynard and Lockwood Reservoirs (Tottenham Hale NR) North of Ferry Lane, these reservoirs, which are part of Walthamstow Wetlands reserve, tend to produce the rarer sightings. Recent records include Black Redstart, Little Gull, Caspian Gull, Black-necked Grebe, and Red-necked Grebe.

King George V Reservoirs (Ponder's Lane NR) Recent records include Black Redstart, Water Pipit, Little Gull, Caspian Gull, Smew, Great Northern Diver, Black-throated Diver, Greater Scaup, and Slavonian Grebe. This reservoir is permit-only but a birdwatching permit can be bought from the Thames Water office in Ferry Lane next to LWT Walthamstow Wetlands for £10 and two passport photos. A complete circuit of the south and north basins is slightly more than 7km (worth it!).

Lee Valley Country Park (Cheshunt NR) Stretching for 1000 acres between Waltham Abbey in Essex to Broxbourne in Hertfordshire, there's a vast area to explore. Lapwing, Common Tern and Black-headed Gull breed here, and recent records include Bittern, Ruff, Spoonbill, and Spotted Crake, as well as Nightingale and Hobby in summer.

RSPB Rye Meads (Rye House NR) For breeding Common Terns, Starling murmurations and photogenic Kingfishers. Recent records include Greater Scaup, Marsh Harrier, Barn Owl, Yellowhammer, Red-crested Pochard, and Jack Snipe.

Hertfordshire Wildlife Trust's Amwell Nature Reserve (St Margaret's NR) Once gravel pits, this reserve is now a mosaic of habitats including reedbeds, grassland and woodland. Recent records include Smew, Red-necked Grebe, Kittiwake, Caspian and Yellow-legged Gulls, and Bittern.

Black-throated Diver

W. SOESTBERGEN, BLICKWINKEL, AGAMI/ALAMY

within-the-M25 list. Gary and I set off up the east side of the southern basin and chat with easy camaraderie. He's good company. Almost immediately, we see the first of the five, a Great Northern Diver, flying away from us across to the west side of the basin. It's unmistakable in flight, like a chunky Cormorant. Near the causeway between basins, a lone male Smew is bobbing around, asleep. It wakes as we get nearer, however, revealing its elegant profile and splendid snowy white-and-black plumage.

Amanda saw a lone male Smew

AMANDA TUKE

So, that's number two.

It's not clear whether you are allowed to walk between the reservoirs, so, loath to disturb the Smew further, we carry on up the east side of the north basin to find a flock of 25 to 30 Tufted Duck. We scan them carefully as a Scaup has been reported, don't find that, but do find a Slavonian Grebe diving in among them, its scarlet eye clearly visible. Nice, and number three on my list.

The wind has dropped and the combination of the sun, a vivid sky, and staring at a glassy expanse of water with the London skyline only just visible on the horizon, is mesmerising, and just what I needed today. Despite the glare, we can just see that some dark shapes in the centre of the north basin are Goldeneye. What initially appears to be seven or eight birds, slowly resolves into an impressive raft of around 20-plus individuals.

Returning back along the west side of the south reservoir, we track down a Black-throated Diver fishing, which is number four on my list. We stop to watch for quite a while, marvelling at how long it stays submerged. It's safe to say that Gary is very, very excited at finding this bird, and phones his partner to share the celebration. It has been a successful lucky trip, only missing on the Scaup. Perhaps it's the unfamiliar sun or emotional rollercoaster, but I'm surprisingly tired, despite the circuit of the two basins being only seven kilometres or so, and have to go in search of a reviving strong coffee before I make my way back to south London.

On the last day of February, when it feels like nature is holding its breath before the tsunami wave of spring finally arrives, I'm back again on the train at Tottenham Hale. This time I'm going a little further up the Lea Valley to RSPB Rye Meads just outside the M25. From Rye House station, I cross the River Lea Navigation on route to the reserve. I tick off Redwing and Red Kite, and the Grey Wagtail bobbing about on one of the structures of a sewage works opposite the reserve gate.

Beyond the visitors' centre, the warming earth is releasing a rich organic scent; a smell you just don't get on very cold days. The Cherry Plums are in blossom and there are a few queen

Rye Meads RSPB

AMANDA TUKE

Slavonian Grebe

OLIVER SMART/ALAMY

> “WE FIND A SLAVONIAN GREBE DIVING AMONG THE DUCKS. NICE, AND NUMBER THREE ON MY LIST”

Buff-tailed Bumblebees flying clumsily from flower to flower. Clouds of gnats dance in sunny patches between the trees. It’s all beginning to happen.

“Do you have the female Greater Scaup just in front of the reedbed?” I ask the other two birders in the Draper Hide. They’re not familiar with the species, so I carefully check the features myself, delighted that my reservoir dip should turn up here, albeit outside the M25. A flock of Lapwings on the island are suddenly spooked by something unseen, and, when I leave the hide, I see there’s a Buzzard and a couple of Red Kites circling high overhead.

At the edge of one of the lagoons, five or six Chiffchaffs are flitting out of and back to the brambles to catch insects, perhaps the gnats, over the water. I make my way to the next hide serenaded by a Cetti’s Warbler sounding like he’s just warming up. From Gadwall Hide, four pairs of Red-crested Pochards are just visible at the edge of the lagoon. The Herts birders don’t seem terribly excited – I’m told the birds are regular here – but, like me, a teenage birdwatcher with us seems to enjoy these fabulous birds, whether introduced or not.

I leave Rye Meads to the sound of a Dunnock singing, the first I’ve heard this year. Back on the train, I get my notes up to date, and upload the record of the Scaup. (Note to my future self, don’t upload records when you’re tired, as it takes twice as long to get them right.), While I know I’ve only just touched on the birding possibilities in the Lea Valley, my within-the-M25 list is already looking a lot more interesting than it was this time last year. BW

The Lea Valley

From polluting industries to an extensive green and blue corridor... The wide floodplain of the Lea Valley meant it was seen in the 18th and 19th Centuries as the perfect place to relocate some of the City of London’s most polluting and water-guzzling industries. Despite its industrial past and as a source of water, brick earth, sand and gravel, the Lea Valley has been transformed and now designated nature reserves and parks, sports facilities and business parks and warehouses have replaced the factories. The 26-mile long river corridor is managed by the Lee Valley Regional Park Authority (Lee and Lea spellings are both used) for recreation and nature.

From its rural source near Luton, the Lea flows onto the floodplain where it meets the boundary of Greater London and then flows past a series of water-filled former gravel quarries in the upper Lea Valley which forms the most extensive and precious wetland area in London. In the lower Lea Valley, the river passes a chain of reservoirs which stretch from Enfield through Tottenham and Walthamstow, and attract some of London’s rarest waterbirds.

The river continues south, dividing to flow both sides of Hackney Marshes, through the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park and round an Ecology Park before meeting the Thames at Bow Creek. Despite the apartment building around the creek, there have thankfully been limited efforts so far to ‘prettify’ the river here, which means there are still valuable mudflats exposed at low tide, and records from this part of the river and the Ecology Park include Oystercatcher, Shelduck, Water Rail, Great and Little Egret, Kingfisher, Reed Warbler and Common Sandpiper.

In 2024, London’s City Hall announced plans to boost the natural flood defences on the Lea, working with the river’s wildlife organisations. It sounds exciting, and is likely to benefit the river’s birdlife as well as Otters, Water Voles and Eels.

Another side of Rye Meads

AMANDA TUKE

Small but MIGHTY

The Sparrowhawk has gone unloved for far too long, writes **Amy Brewer**

If you've ever seen a bird of prey up close, you will understand how looking into its eyes is like looking into the heart of a fire. You are looking directly into the soul of an animal that knows it must kill to survive. A unique animal, full of individual character and personality no doubt, but a creature evolved over hundreds of millions of years to be as efficient at hunting as possible. The Sparrowhawk is no exception, and this is the bird of prey that you will be most likely to encounter in your garden.

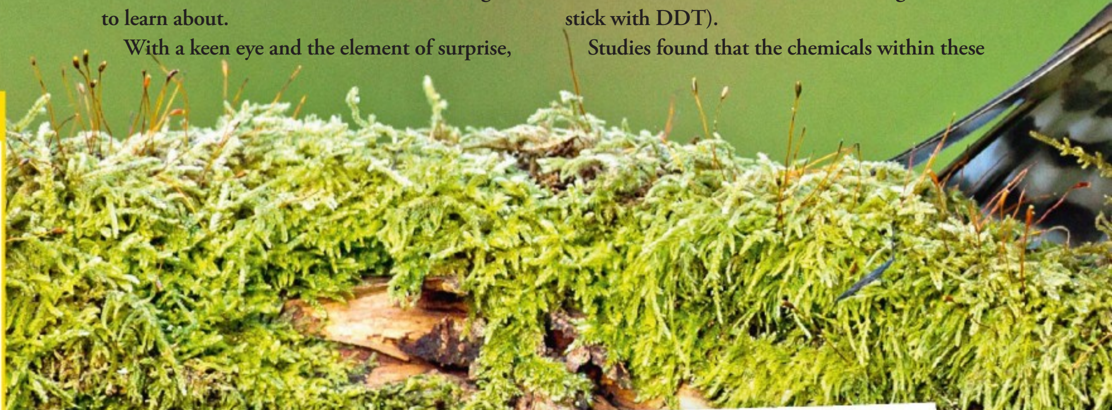
This bird may not be quite as flashy as the Red Kite, nor as fast as the Peregrine, nor as uniquely skilful as the Kestrel, but it has its own set of behaviours which make it a fascinating bird to learn about.

With a keen eye and the element of surprise, this bird of prey is a wonderful hunter, and this small but mighty creature often gets overlooked.

Sadly, like many other species of raptor, the Sparrowhawk once went through a period of intense persecution – to the point where they were in danger of becoming extinct in the UK. The organochlorine pesticide crisis of the 1950s and 1960s had some of the most devastating effects on British wildlife we'd ever seen.

Sparrowhawks, along with other birds of prey like the Peregrine, eat birds that consume insects. A lot of the insects *those* birds were eating during that period had been poisoned directly by pesticides, such as DDT (dichloro-diphenyl-trichloroethane – but that's a little long, so let's stick with DDT).

Studies found that the chemicals within these



SPECIES FACTFILE

Scientific name: *Accipiter nisus*
Falconer's name: Musket
Length: 28-38cm
Wingspan: 55-70cm
Habitat: Most common in woodlands, wetlands, farmlands and heathlands but do also live in urban areas. Found across Europe and Asia, all the way to Siberia and Japan
Diet: Small to medium-sized birds, including Starlings and Woodpigeons; very keen on song birds
Average speed: Roughly 30-40km/h
Eye colour: Striking burnt orange/bright yellow eyes – can sometimes turn red with age
Stature: Small, agile birds with rounded wings and long tails that act as rudders
Current population: 35,000 breeding pairs in the UK
Average lifespan: Four years
Weight: 110-196g (male) 185-342g (female)

Amy's garden has been visited by both male and female (pictured) hunters

GRAHAM DUNN/ALAMY

pesticides were thinning the shells of birds' eggs. This was leading to more incubatory breakages and thus drastic population plunges.

The Sparrowhawk's decline wasn't helped by further persecution from game bird owners. Its bounce-back in the 1970s through to the mid-2000s was all thanks to the banning of these pesticides and greater legal protection. Sparrowhawk numbers increased by a staggering 108% during this period.

Now for my encounter. A couple of years ago, I was sitting at my kitchen table on a work-from-home day, probably sipping on one of my many daily coffees, when an unknown object descended from the sky. Out of the corner of my eye, I perceived that a mass of feathers had plummeted upon the earth.

What the hell? was my first – and really my only – thought. I shouted for my dad to come and look, and together we stared out through the windows of our French doors to see an elegant, frighteningly focused small dinosaur staring back at us. My dog was frenzied.

The Sparrowhawk had a plump pigeon in its talons – quite the feast for a bird of its size. This hawk was long and slim, but with a very modest frame. With its barred chest and striped, brown tail, this was the most beautiful bird I'd ever seen.

After about 10 minutes, it looked like it was getting ready to make moves. I mentally prepared myself to say goodbye and return to work.

But all this Sparrowhawk did was fly to the back of our garden, and it remained there for at least an hour, plucking away at the carcass of the poor pigeon. My dad managed to capture some footage.

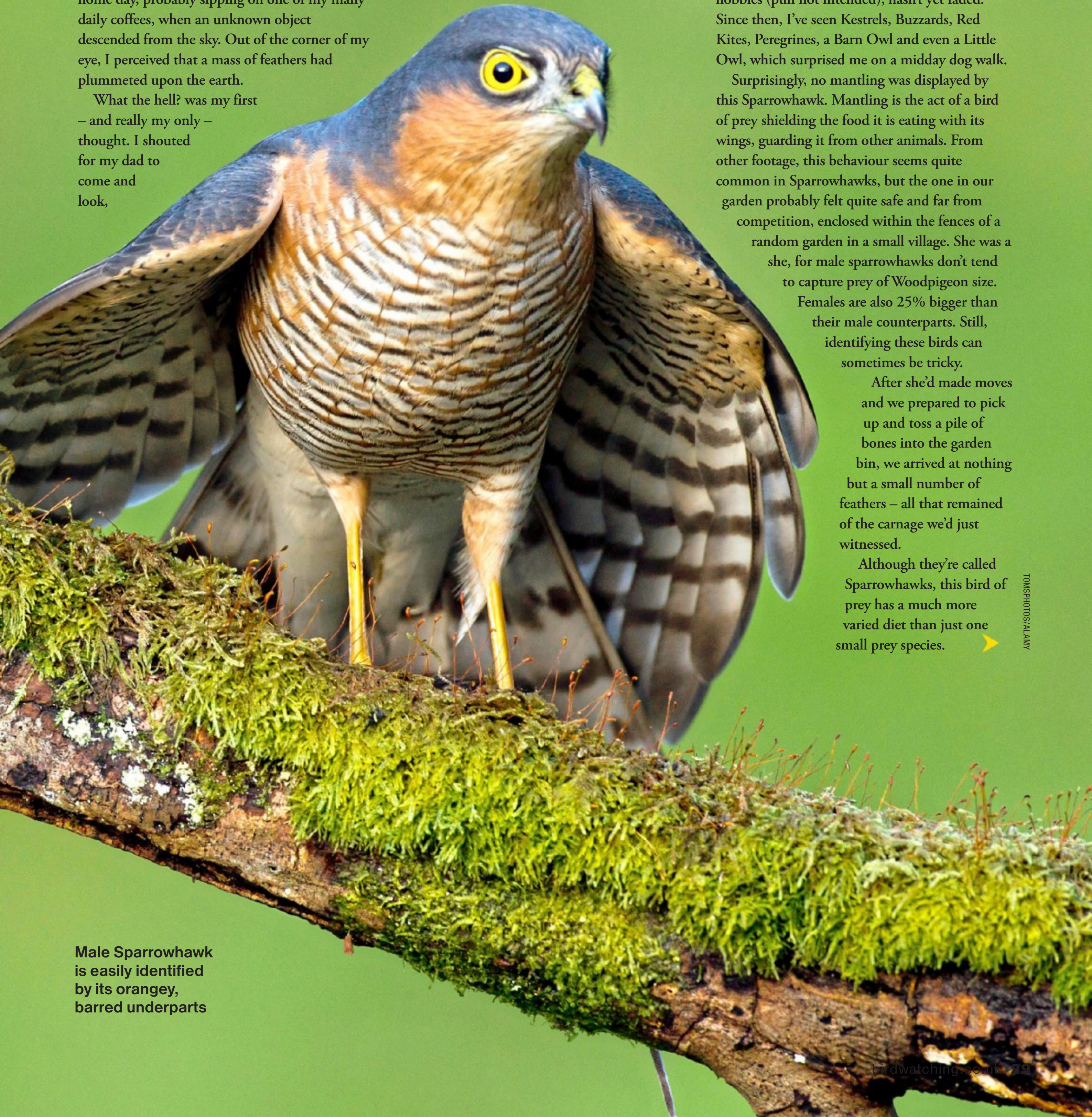
Only one in 10 Sparrowhawk hunting attempts is successful. The fact that this happened in *my* garden… well, the odds felt indescribably small.

That day set me off on an obsessive bird hyperfixation – one that, unlike a lot of my other hobbies (pun not intended), hasn't yet faded. Since then, I've seen Kestrels, Buzzards, Red Kites, Peregrines, a Barn Owl and even a Little Owl, which surprised me on a midday dog walk.

Surprisingly, no mantling was displayed by this Sparrowhawk. Mantling is the act of a bird of prey shielding the food it is eating with its wings, guarding it from other animals. From other footage, this behaviour seems quite common in Sparrowhawks, but the one in our garden probably felt quite safe and far from competition, enclosed within the fences of a random garden in a small village. She was a she, for male sparrowhawks don't tend to capture prey of Woodpigeon size. Females are also 25% bigger than their male counterparts. Still, identifying these birds can sometimes be tricky.

After she'd made moves and we prepared to pick up and toss a pile of bones into the garden bin, we arrived at nothing but a small number of feathers – all that remained of the carnage we'd just witnessed.

Although they're called Sparrowhawks, this bird of prey has a much more varied diet than just one small prey species.



Male Sparrowhawk is easily identified by its orangey, barred underparts

TOMSPHOTOS/ALAMY

Male Sparrowhawk is significantly smaller than the female

OUR WILD LIFE PHOTOGRAPHY/ALAMY

According to several sources, these birds have been found to eat more than 120 different species of garden bird, varying in size, from the Blue Tit to the Starling to the Woodpigeon. To maintain enough energy to survive, these birds must eat roughly 40-50g (males) or 50-70g (females) per day.

It can sometimes be tricky to identify male and female Sparrowhawks. I was lucky that my bird made things easier by the prey species she was eating, as well as the fact that she had the typically larger frame, mottled brown and white chested and brown-backed colouring of the average female Sparrowhawk. However, with age, some females grow to look a little more like the males – grey-backed, with barred ginger and white chest feathers. Juvenile males can also look like females.

When it comes to nesting behaviours, Sparrowhawks, like many other birds of prey, prefer twig platforms high up in trees. Breeding season is between May and July, during which between two to nine eggs (far more likely four or five) are laid. The female will incubate them for 32 to 35 days. Male Sparrowhawks don't usually incubate the eggs at all, unlike other birds of prey, such as the Peregrine, where the extent to which each male incubates varies. The only job of the male Sparrowhawk during the incubation period is to provide food for their partner and chicks. However, he does do a fair amount of the initial nest-building.

Then, after they've had enough of life inside of their small prisons, those chicks will begin to emerge from their shells, with an initial fluffy white coating of down. After fully hatching, these newborn Sparrowhawks will remain in the nest for an average of 26.5 to 30.5 days before fledging. The survival rate for the first year of these precious serial killers' lives sits at a tragically low 34%, though this figure is, of course, a lot higher than it was during the pesticide crisis.

So why are Sparrowhawks such underappreciated birds of prey? Why exactly have they earned such a poor reputation? Perhaps it's mostly down to how 'cute' their prey of choosing happens to be.

As difficult as it is to witness your feathered garden friends getting snatched by Sparrowhawks, this bird of prey is not the only predator of the sky. And Sparrowhawks are not immune to predation themselves, either. They can end up as food for other birds of prey, such as the much larger Goshawk.

When it comes to their contribution to the falling populations of garden birds, data appears unable to find a causal link between Sparrowhawks and these declines. The overwhelming answer, which appears on sites like the BTO's, appears to be no. Sparrowhawks do not have a significant, unnatural part to play in the decline of garden bird populations. In fact, studies have found that they tend to move into areas where there is a surplus of songbirds. And often, they will take the weaker or already dying individuals.

As these beasts are more commonly seen in gardens than any other UK bird of prey, perhaps this is why they get all the flack for songbird deaths – as they're more readily visible to us than the elusive Goshawk or other larger hunters.

But the Sparrowhawk wasn't always so ill-favoured. It has often been the subject of many literary pieces, including Ted Hughes' 1957 poem, A Sparrow-Hawk...

Slips from the eye-corner – overtaking,
Your first thought.

Through your mulling gaze over haphazard earth,
The sun's cooled carbon wing,
Whets the eyebeam.

Those eyes in their helmet,
Still wired direct,
To the nuclear core – they alone,

Laser the lark-shaped hole,
In the lark's song.

We find the earth-tied spurs, among soft ashes.
And maybe we find him,

Materialised by twilight and dew,
Still as a listener –

The warrior.

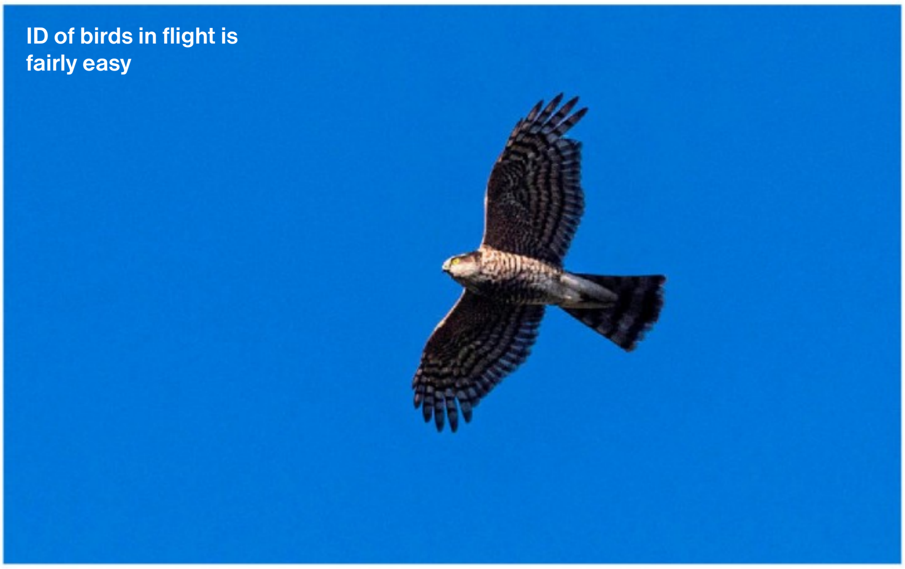
Blue shoulder-cloak wrapped about him,
Leaning, hunched,
Among the oaks of the harp.

They also have prominence in a variety of cultures, including ancient Egypt and ancient Greece – representing and commanding the wind, respectively.

The Sparrowhawk is a force of nature that hides in plain sight and springs forth at a millisecond's notice. It seemingly appears from nowhere and vanishes just as suddenly, at a moment of its choosing. It is a bird that deserves more love. You may, like me, be lucky, and get several hours in the presence of this majestic bird. Or you may only get a fleeting look at this animal that seems to live under constant caution.

Once the sky opens up and a Sparrowhawk drops into your garden, looking straight at you, you'll never be able to ignore the wingbeat of a single bird ever again.

● Since writing this feature, I've had another Sparrowhawk drop into my garden – this time a male! He was eating a Starling. It's never nice to see, but, like all birds, he has to eat. Another unbelievable moment on my birding journey. BW



ID of birds in flight is fairly easy

T.M.O.BIRDS/ALAMY

DAVID TIPLING PHOTO LIBRARY/ALAMY

The eyes
of a killer!

> “SPARROWHAWKS ARE NOT IMMUNE TO PREDATION THEMSELVES. THEY CAN END UP AS FOOD FOR THE MUCH LARGER GOSHAWK”

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BIRDWATCHING REVIEW (FEB. 2025)

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Come in, we're OPEN

26 years ago, the estate was the Yorkshire Red Kite Release Project site

Wild and WONDERFUL

It’s known for its Red Kites, but the suburban stately home of Harewood House leads the way in rewilding, writes **John Miles**

GTP/ALAMY

The great lake attracts geese, ducks such as Mandarin, and waders

JOHN MILES

The 4,000-acre Harewood House estate sits on the outskirts of Leeds, now classed as England's second largest city, if calculated by the population covered by Leeds City Council. The estate was bought by Henry Lascelles in 1738, with the house built soon after by John Carr of York, with interiors by Robert Adam and landscapes by the famous Lancelot 'Capability' Brown. The house also has an art collection to rival the finest in Britain.

The money came from the family's main business, based on the sugar industry in the West Indies, and the family are still present today.

Being so close not just to Leeds, but the many nearby industrial towns often born out of coal or wool, Harewood House has always been a big public attraction. It was formerly in the public eye because of its 'bird garden', which was open to the public for 53 years, but also reared rare species such as Bald Ibis. It closed in 2023 – the Harewood House Trust said that the expense of the garden had grown too much – but wild birds are anyway, now, a far greater attraction for visitors.

In 1999, the estate became the Yorkshire Red Kite Project release site. This was one of 12 sites around Great Britain where reintroductions took place, with mainly young kites brought in from Spain and Scandinavia.

They were taken from nests at an age of four to five weeks, then kept in large release pens with views across the surrounding countryside, so that the young birds could adapt quickly to their new surroundings. They were released at around eight weeks old, having been fed without seeing the human who provided the food, with the food often roadkill etc. The Red Kite is mainly a scavenger, so this was what they would have naturally looked for in the wild.

Harewood's kites came from Spain to start with, but with so much breeding success in the Chilterns reintroduction scheme, many eventually started to come from there.

In total, 90 birds were released here and were soon seen over a wide area of Yorkshire, even into urban areas and over golf courses like Alwoodley, just down the road, where my eldest son gave lessons on a Saturday – he always stopped play to

➤

Mandarin Duck (drake)

DAVID TIPLING PHOTO LIBRARY/ALAMY

Grey Partridge could succeed here now

NATURE IN STOCK/ALAMY

show the young folk the kites flying over!

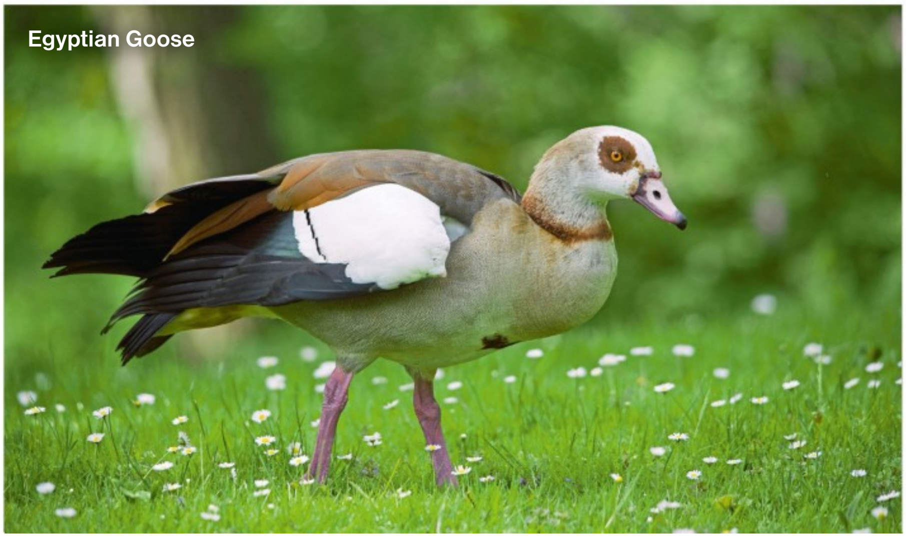
Breeding took place on the estate soon after and soon spread to several other locations in Yorkshire, with new groups of nesting birds found in East Yorkshire in the southern section of the Yorkshire Wolds, and North Yorkshire.

By 2017, 128 pairs were recorded breeding, and as Red Kites often love to roost together, the estate had counted over 120 birds coming to roost – a wonderful spectacle. So successful was Britain in producing Red Kites that with a decline in Spain, Red Kites were shipped back across the water to boost this now declining population.

Today, the estate has moved into rewilding and much more nature-friendly farming methods. The estate is made up of ancient and semi-natural woodland, wood pasture parkland, arable farmland, ponds, lakes, wetland and the floodplain of the River Wharfe.

The estate has a long history of farming, going back to the medieval period, and crops grown today include wheat, barley, oilseed rape and maize. But the estate also works to deliver environmentally-friendly farming that's good for wildlife and delivers ecosystem services that help to promote health and well-being.

It has improved more than 25 miles of its farmland hedgerows in recent years, and employs buffer strips around most of the field margins to make space for wildlife. This also helps to protect soils and store water, but has helped a variety of species across the estate, using less harmful pesticides and chemicals and greatly reducing the need for fertilisers.


Egyptian Goose

PREMIUM STOCK PHOTOGRAPHY GMBH/ALAMY

Birds that have benefited from this hedge management include Yellowhammer, Whitethroat, Linnet, Goldfinch, Chaffinch and Tree Sparrow. Grey Partridge was tried as a breeding bird when it was introduced years ago when the estate ran a game shoot, but birds never succeeded in keeping a population going because there was not enough good habitat for them. Now, with the increase in hedgerow management and the use of buffer strips, the habitat has much improved and bringing back Grey Partridge seems to have a much better chance of succeeding this time around.

The hedges are very good at providing food for voles and mice, which in turn increase the number of birds of prey such as Red Kites (of course), Buzzards, and especially owls, with five species found on the estate – breeding Barn, Tawny, Little and occasional Long-eared, while Short-eared Owl is more of a winter visitor.

New scrub and tree planting by existing woods are to give a better 'edge' effect and will increase many species, while new hay meadows will add new flora as well as food for owls. Both the hedges and grasslands are used by harriers, too, with Marsh more often in summer while Hen Harrier is seen in winter, along with the occasional Merlin.

Breeding waders include Oystercatcher and Lapwing, with one or two pairs of Curlew trying to breed on the parkland most summers. Common Sandpiper is found along the River Wharfe, with Woodcock in the woodlands.

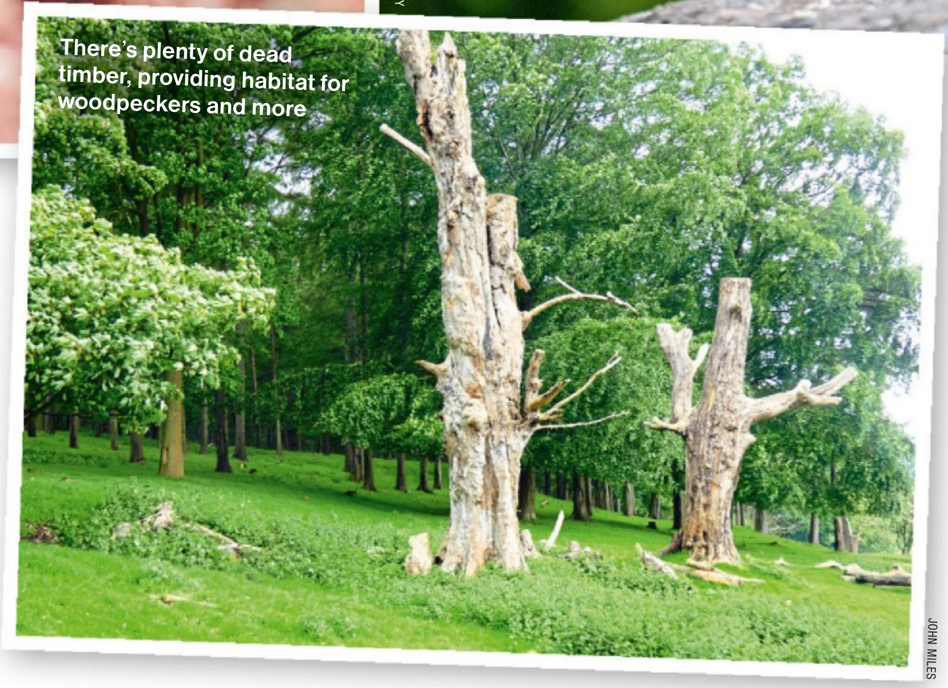
The grassland is home to a range of rare breed livestock, which includes Hebridean sheep and Highland cattle. A big source of pride for the

Woodcock

MIKE LANE/ALAMY

Oystercatcher thrives here

IAN RUTHERFORD/ALAMY



There's plenty of dead timber, providing habitat for woodpeckers and more

JOHN MILES

estate is their pedigree Aberdeen Angus, while visitors using the 16 miles of public footpaths here (including parts of the Ebor Way and Leeds Country Way), can see both Red and Fallow Deer farmed, while Roe Deer is also present. Sheep would have been a commoner sight on the estate at one time, with both Bradford and Leeds born out of the woollen industry, so the newest additions to the land are six Wensleydale sheep noted for their long wool. This a very rare breed and at a time when wool prices are at rock bottom, it is hoped that this wool can be used locally. All these animals are used for the benefit of the land, with no overgrazing.

Much of this grassland years ago would have been classed as 'wood pasture', and the estate is keen to reinstate much of this. So far more than 200 ancient and veteran trees have been located on site, some of which date back to medieval times. The sheer amount of dead wood found in the grassland and in the woods has resulted in a large mixture of beetles, and these attract the attention of Green and Great Spotted Woodpeckers, plus Nuthatch and Treecreeper.

The University of Leeds has come up with a figure that suggests a value of approximately £29 million in 'ecosystem service benefits' from these trees. This study is the first of its kind to analyse the trees of stately homes for economic benefits other than timber value, and highlights that the trees are a valuable commodity. One historic problem the estate has, though, is the large areas of rhododendron once used for Pheasant cover. This will be removed and to allow natural growth under the existing woodland, with the felled material ending up in the biomass plant heating the many buildings.

One big draw for birds is the great lake, positioned for the view from the big house. It sits in open ground with woodland and odd trees joining it from the far side. This 30-plus acre site is ideal for wildfowl dropping in while following the Wharfe valley. It has many breeding Greylag and Canada Geese, and a new addition to the list is Egyptian Goose, slowly moving north. Both migrating Pink-footed and Barnacle Geese have passed by in winter, while a spring specialist is Garganey. Diving ducks like Tufted Duck and Goldeneye use the lake, while Scaup and Red-crested Pochard have been found on passage.

With so many ancient trees on site, Mandarins breed here, using the hollows in the trees to nest. Whooper Swans can join the many Mutes in winter, while both Black-necked and Red-necked Grebes add colour to the lake on occasion, joining the breeding Great Crested and Little Grebes.

Of course, adding to the Red Kites are a long list of birds of prey passing through the estate, with Osprey now delivering annual sightings, so much so that platforms are potentially going to be erected in the hope that they'll breed – not only is the River Wharfe close by but Eccup Reservoir is just over a mile away to the south. Peregrines can drift over from the urban Leeds population while Goshawk has been seen, with recent records of Hobby, too.

> “WITH SO MANY ANCIENT TREES ON SITE, MANDARINS BREED HERE, USING THE HOLLOWS IN THE TREES TO NEST”

Both Great White and Little Egrets have used the lake, along with Glossy Ibis and White Stork. Waders like Green Sandpiper use the area each winter, while Greenshank, Jack Snipe and Black-tailed Godwit can drop in. The many Beech trees in the woods can draw Bramblings and a few Hawfinches in 'mast' years, while Black Redstart has been seen, so it is worthwhile scanning the many monuments on the estate to find more records of this bird.

So, enjoy the many paths through the estate and witness these great changes in management taking place, benefiting wildlife, the estate and the mental health of the people coming here from a huge urban area of Yorkshire. BW

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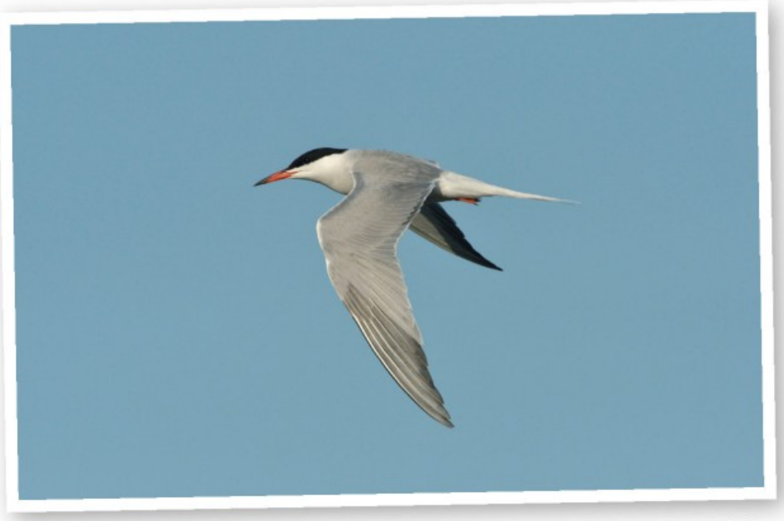
IDChallenge

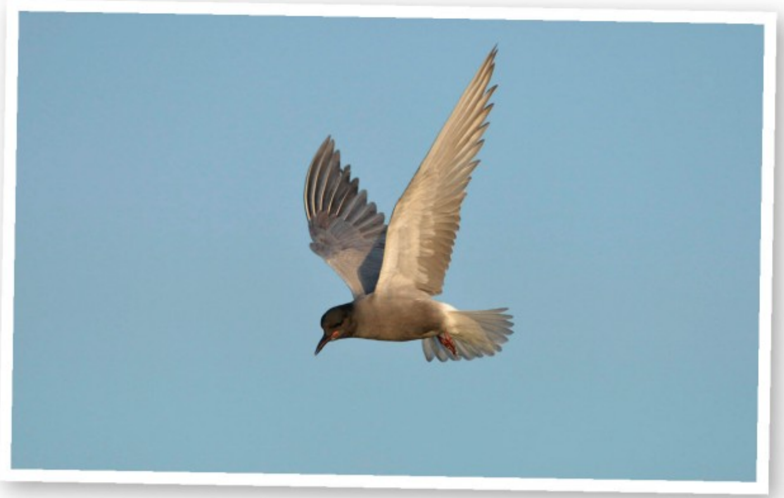
This month's challenge is all about the identification of **terns**

One of the delights of spring is the return of elegant, charismatic terns. Most are 'sea terns', summer-visiting coastal nesters in vastly variable numbers. Others, particularly the 'marsh terns', are relatively scarce passage birds which pass through coastal areas and inland waterbodies before crossing the sea to the continent to breed. Common Terns are sea terns which breed at inland sites as well as in coastal colonies. The rest of the sea terns, though, are (like the marsh terns) mainly seen at inland lakes, reservoirs, gravel pits and so on, only as they drop in for a bathe or perhaps a feed, before continuing their journey. Late April and May are the peak times for such movements. So, brush up on your ID skills now, by naming the six species on this page, then reading our solutions and reasoning overleaf. And if this is not enough, turn the page once again for a few extra tips for tern identification.

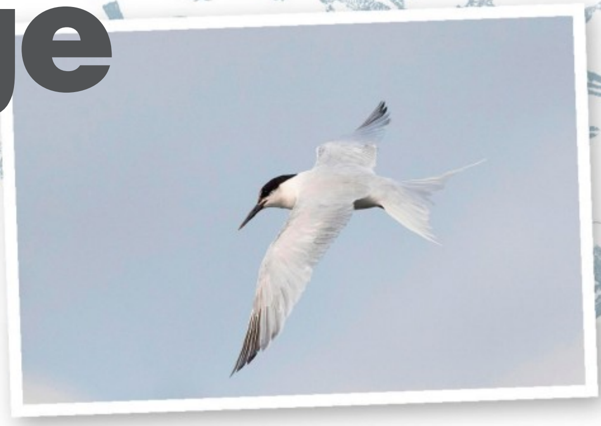
SUBTITLE CAN YOU NAME THESE TERNS?



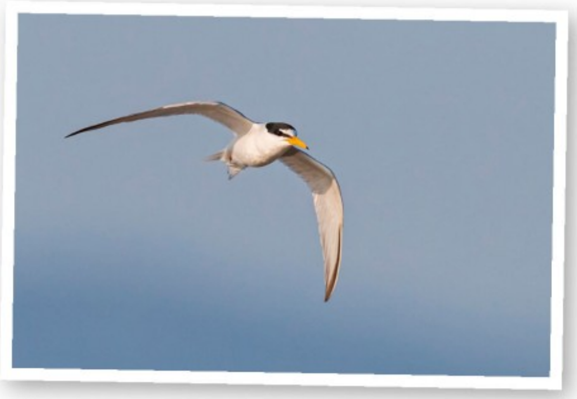
Bird 1:



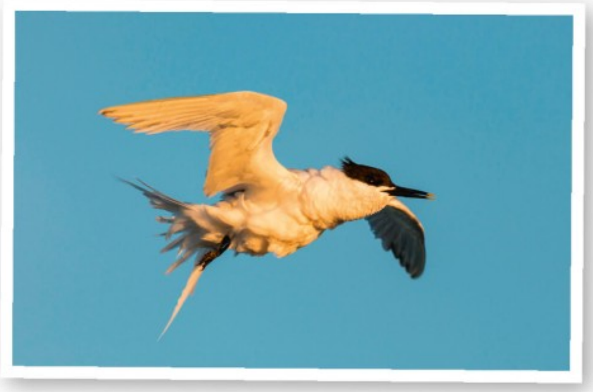
Bird 2:



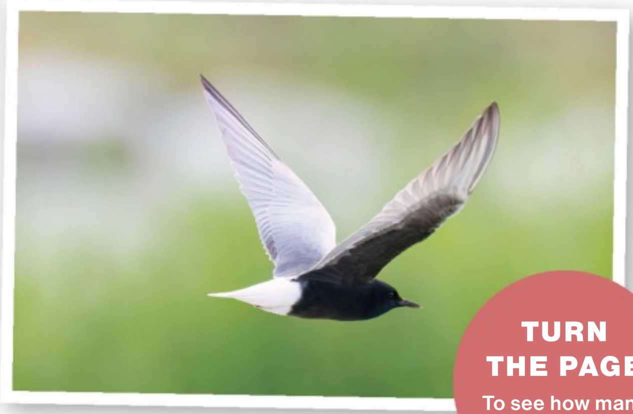
Bird 3:



Bird 4:



Bird 5:



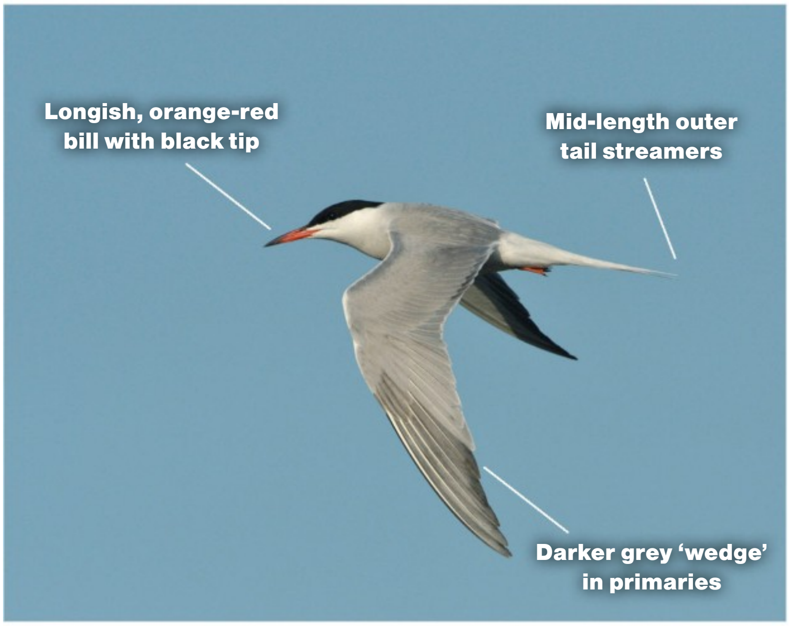
Bird 6:

TURN THE PAGE
To see how many you got right!

Answers & solutions

Check your answers against our explanations. Remember, there are no ‘trick’ birds or extreme rarities among these...

ID TIP!
Often the first indications that terns are around are their calls. Learn the calls, starting with the harsh *‘kirrick’* of Sandwich Tern


Longish, orange-red bill with black tip
Mid-length outer tail streamers
Darker grey ‘wedge’ in primaries

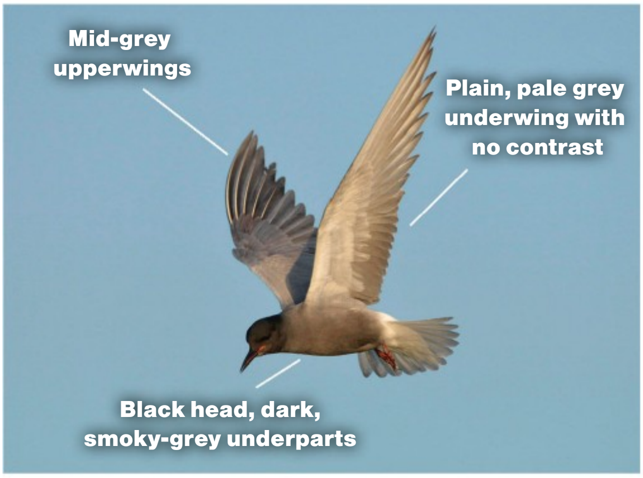
PAUL R. STERRY, NATURE PHOTOGRAPHERS LTD/ALAMY

BIRD 1

This bird appears, at first glance, to be a typical ‘sea tern’: black-capped, pale grey-mantled and -winged, longish white tail streamers etc. Furthermore, it must be one of the ones which have red in the bill and feet (ruling out Sandwich and Little Terns, which have mainly black and yellow bills, respectively). Roseate Terns usually have largely black bills, perhaps with a red base, paler grey upperparts and dark mainly towards the leading edge of the outer primaries. We can rule out Arctic Tern by the length of the bill, as well as its black tip; but also by those ‘primary wedges’. This must be a **Common Tern**.

Key features

- Quite long, black-tipped, orange-red bill
- Darker grey ‘wedge’ in outer primaries
- Mid-length tail streamers
- Orange-red feet


Mid-grey upperwings
Plain, pale grey underwing with no contrast
Black head, dark, smoky-grey underparts

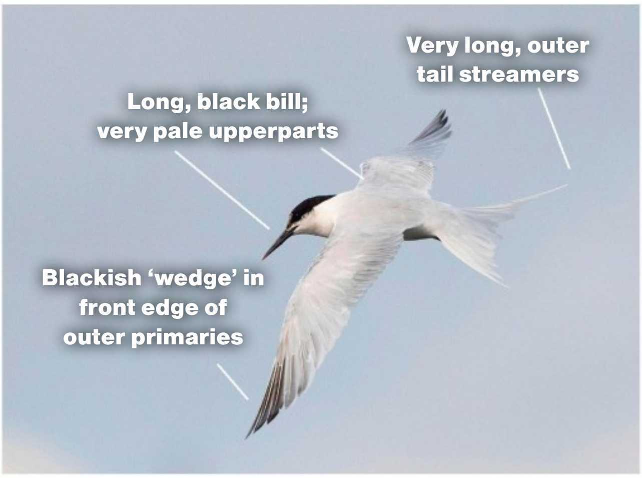
MALCOLM SCHUYL/ALAMY

BIRD 2

This dusky beauty is clearly not of the typical ‘sea tern’ appearance, being very different in appearance from Bird 1. The head end is jet black, including the shortish bill, and the underparts are a dark, smoky grey (with whiter undertail coverts). Surely this is one of the black terns. The underwings are uniformly pale grey with no contrast between the underwing coverts and the flight feathers. In White-winged Black Tern, the underwing coverts are jet black, contrasting with the paler secondaries and primaries. The upper wings also appear to be mid-grey. This pretty tern is a **Black Tern**, a bird which we see as a regular passage visitor in May.

Key features

- Largely dark grey underparts
- Black head
- Shortish, black bill
- Pale grey underwing and tail; mid-grey upperwing


Very long, outer tail streamers
Long, black bill; very pale upperparts
Blackish ‘wedge’ in front edge of outer primaries

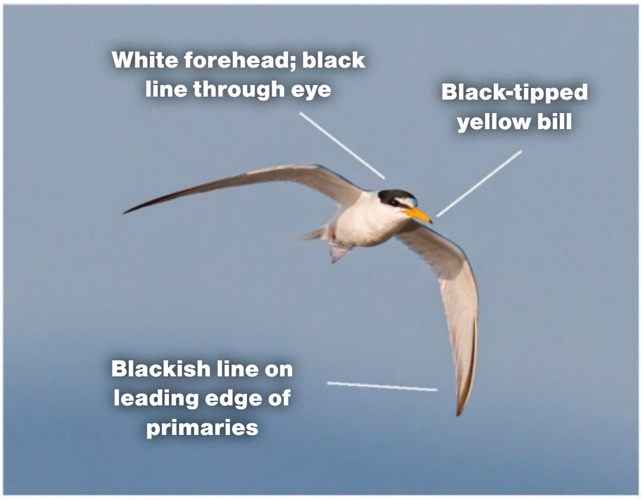
D. MONTICELLI, BLICKWINKEL, AGAMI/ALAMY

BIRD 3

In many ways this bird shares features with Bird 1, with the structure and general pattern of a more or less typical ‘sea tern’. The main differences from the Common Tern pictured above are the black bill (though Common Terns have black bills in immature and winter plumage), the paler grey back and wings, the apparently slightly longer tail streamers, and the blackish wedges at the leading edge of the outer primary flight feathers. The other regular species of similar build, the Arctic Tern, lacks the dark ‘wedges’ altogether, presenting a cleaner, almost translucent white, outer wing. This pale, long-tailed sea tern is a **Roseate Tern**, a rare breeder in the UK.

Key features

- Pale mantle and wings
- Black bill
- Long outer tail streamers
- Blackish ‘wedge’ toward leading edge of outer primaries


White forehead; black line through eye
Black-tipped yellow bill
Blackish line on leading edge of primaries

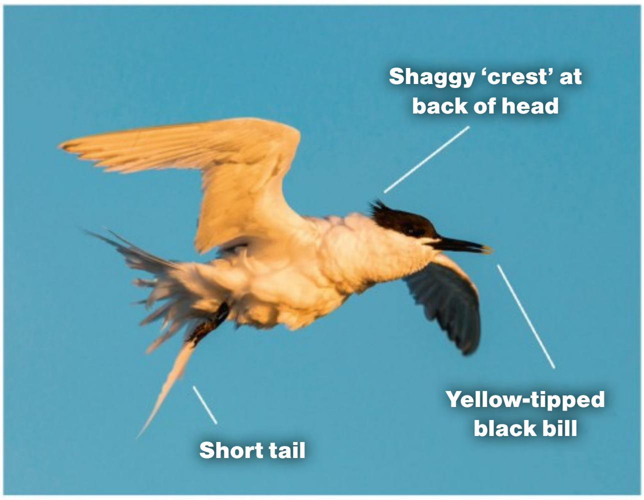
MCPHOTO, MAS, BLICKWINKEL/ALAMY

BIRD 4

The identity of this white-breasted and -bellied tern is pretty straightforward, mainly owing to the combination of the bill colour and the head pattern. The bill is uniquely (in a regular British context) bright orange-yellow with a tiny black tip. Our other terns either have red in the bill, or the bills are black; or black with a yellow tip, in the case of the Sandwich Tern. Only the Little Tern has a bill patterned like this. This identification is further backed up by the white patch above the bill on the forecrown, above a black line running 'through' the eye, as well as the thin black line on the leading edge of the outer wing. Finally, the forked tail appears short, lacking outer 'streamers'. This bird must be a **Little Tern**.

Key features

- Black-tipped yellow bill
- Short forked tail
- Black leading edge to outer wing
- White forehead above black eye-stripe


Shaggy 'crest' at back of head
Yellow-tipped black bill
Short tail

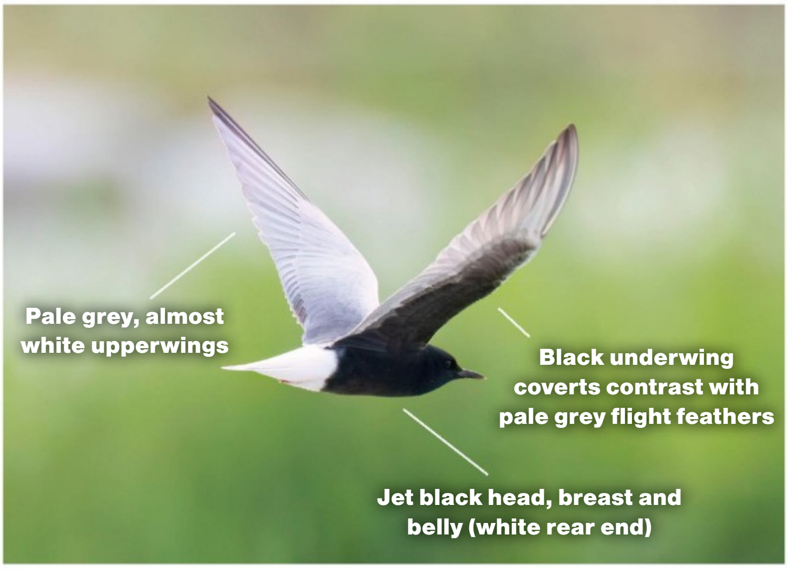
IAN BUTLER PHOTOGRAPHY/ALAMY

BIRD 5

This tern is shaking itself mid-flight, in the golden light of early morning or evening. It has two main giveaway features which identify it readily. The first is the colour of the long, straight bill, it being black with a small yellow tip – a feature which is unique to Sandwich Tern. The second particularly pro-Sandwich Tern feature is the shaggy rear to the crown feathers, making a sort of 'crest'. Additional features supporting the identification include the the largely 'clean' white underwings and the relatively short (for a tern) tail and black legs/feet. This is indeed a **Sandwich Tern**, in breeding plumage. Later in the summer, the forecrown will become white, even though the adult terns will be still be at the breeding colony.

Key features

- Yellow-tipped black bill
- Shaggy crest at back of black crown
- Relatively short, forked tail
- Clean white underwings


Pale grey, almost white upperwings
Black underwing coverts contrast with pale grey flight feathers
Jet black head, breast and belly (white rear end)

VINCENZO IACOVONI/ALAMY

BIRD 6

We finish with a relatively simple identification, especially if you have been following the other birds in the ID Challenge (notably Bird 2). It is the most striking of all the terns here, with a jet black head (including the bill), breast and belly contrasting with the white tail end, including the undertail coverts. The underwing coverts are also jet black, contrasting strongly with the pale grey outer wing (flight feathers). The upper wings are pale grey, tending almost to white near the leading edge of the inner wing. This bird can only be an immaculate **White-winged Black Tern** in full breeding plumage. White-winged Black Terns are quite rare, but regular spring visitors to the UK.

Key features

- Black head, breast and belly (and bill)
- Black underwing coverts
- Pale grey flight feathers
- White tail end

MY FAVOURITE SITE "FERRY MEADOWS CP, PETERBOROUGH, HAS A GREAT RECORD FOR ATTRACTING PASSAGE TERNS" **MIKE WEEDON, ASSISTANT EDITOR**

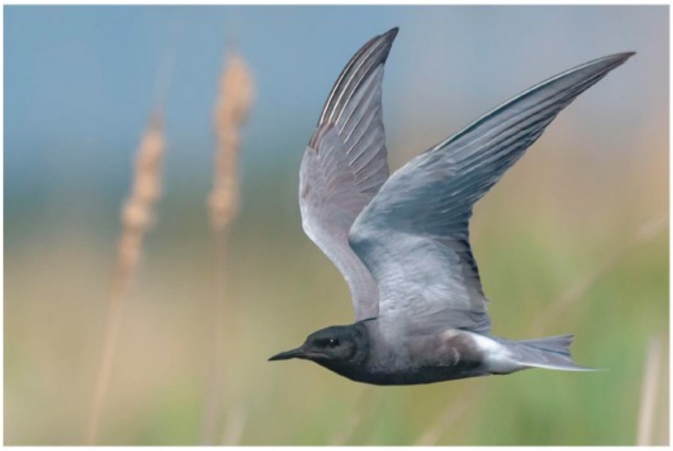
ID Tips & tricks

Here are a few extra tips to help you identify Terns

ID TIP!
There are three 'marsh terns' and all are small, much smaller than other terns, apart from Little Tern

Black Tern vs White-winged Black Tern

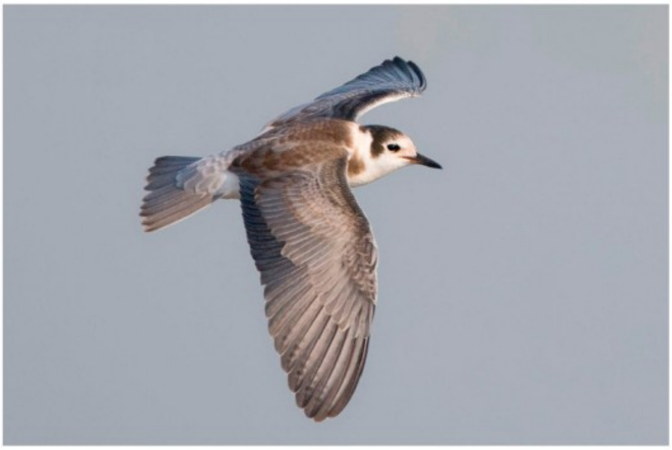
It is worth refreshing the ID of the two black tern species. After all, for most of the year we don't see them at all, and when we do, we often need a reminder. Note that Black Terns are fairly scarce visitors, while White-winged Black Terns are pretty rare.



MIKALAY VARABEY/ALAMY

Black Tern

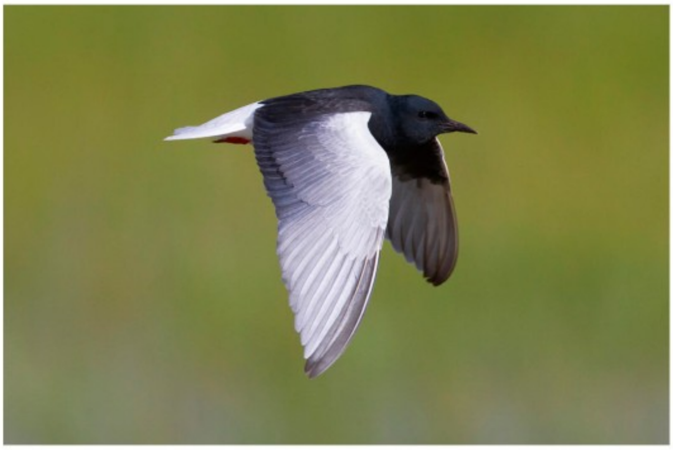
- Head blacker than dark, smoky grey breast and belly
- Relatively long bill
- Underwings uniformly pale grey, with little contrast
- Upperwing similar mid-grey to mantle
- Grey rump and tail; black legs and feet



MARC GUYT/ALAMY

Juv Black Tern

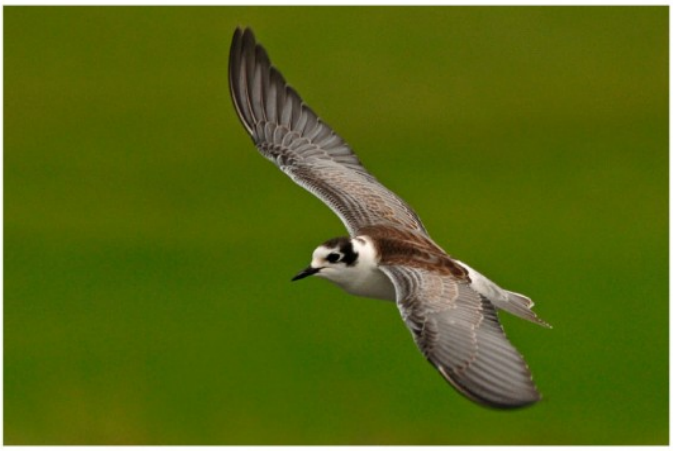
- Dark mark on flanks just in front of wing
- Relatively long bill
- Relatively little contrast between brown mantle and grey wings
- Grey rump
- Grey tail



DANIELE OCCHIATO, BUITEN-BEELD/ALAMY

White-winged Black Tern

- Head, breast and belly jet black
- Relatively short, fine bill
- Underwings coverts black, and pale grey flight feathers
- Upperwing pale, almost white grey, contrasts with black mantle
- White rump and tail; bright red legs and feet



STEVE YOUNG/ALAMY

Juv White-winged Black Tern

- No dark mark on flanks just in front of wing
- Relatively short, fine bill
- Large contrast between dark brown mantle and grey wings
- White rump
- Grey tail

SNAP IT!

Have you taken a great shot of a tern? If so, please share it! Send your photos to: birdwatching@bauermedia.co.uk

NEXT MONTH'S CHALLENGE

British owls

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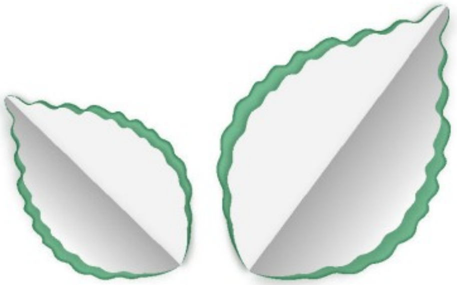

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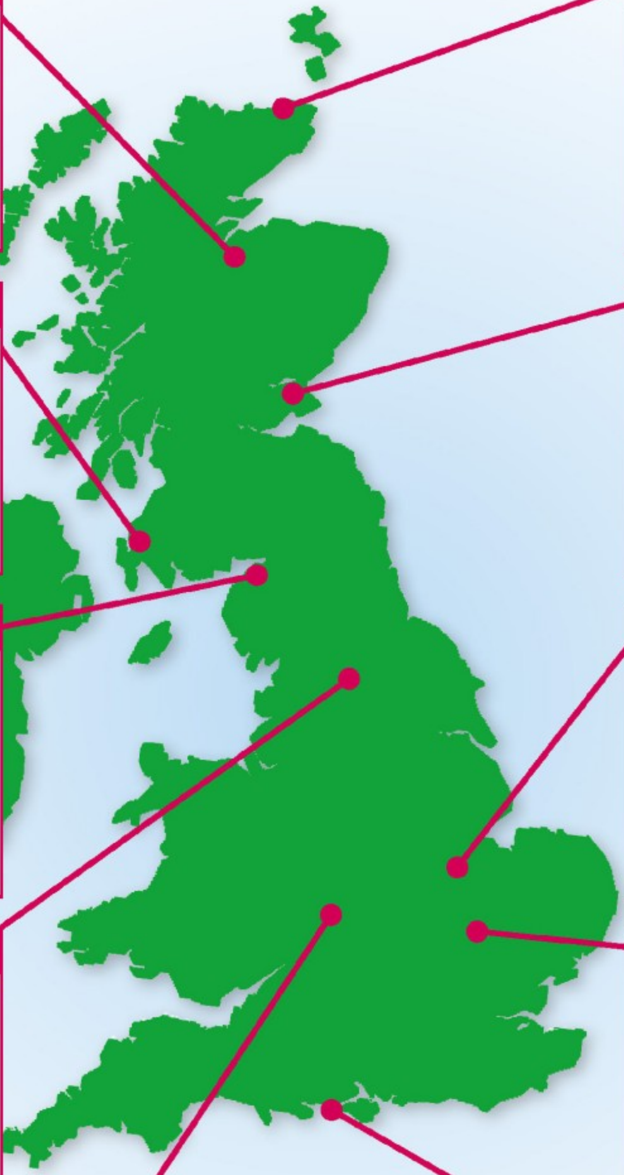


GARBOLE

PENWHIRN RESERVOIR

ANTHORN

VALLEY OF DESOLATION

THURSO

BAMFF

MAXEY CUT

HOLT ISLAND

MORE SITES

For a full list of the sites we've featured, go to *birdwatching.co.uk/gbindex*

GO BIRDING INDEX

ILMINGTON HILL

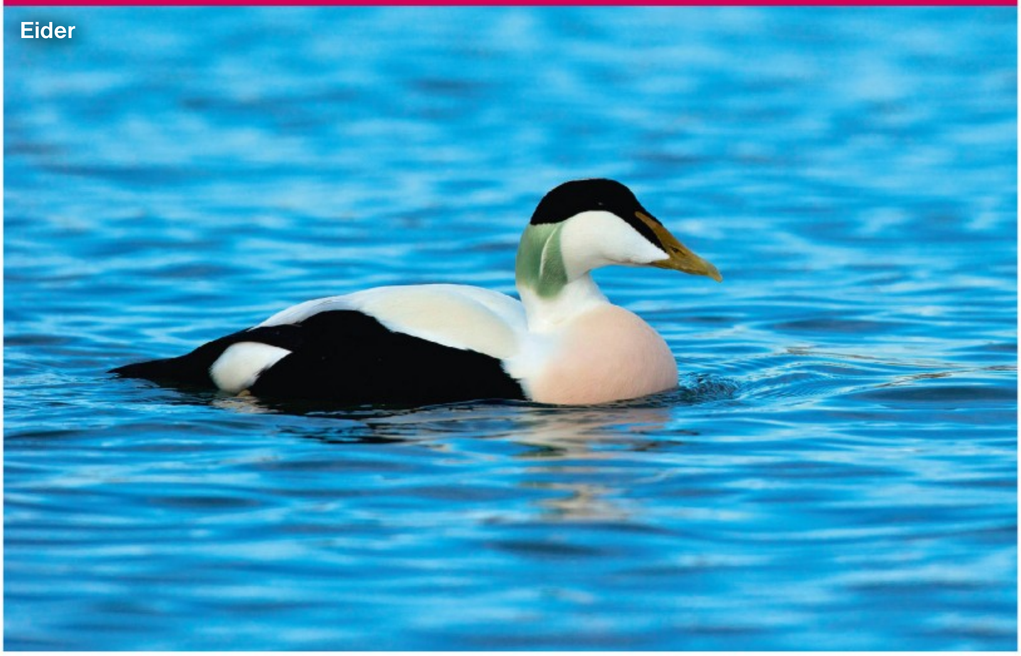
KEYHAVEN

CAITHNESS

THURSO

MAX MILES ON FOOT: 3 MIN TIME: 2-3 HOURS

Woodland, beach, and estuary make for great birding


Eider

PETER BARRITT/ALAMY

Thurso is mainland Britain's most northerly town, with the Orkney Islands just a stone's throw away, and bordered by incredible coastal scenery and the the sweeping wilderness of the flow country. Thus, it offers a vast range of species that are possible to be viewed here all year round. From White-tailed Sea Eagles travelling to and from Orkney to wintering sea ducks, divers and gulls, plus local specialities such as Hooded Crow. Thurso is the ideal spot for a week of birding in Caithness, as places such as Dunnet Head and Forsinard Flows offer a tremendous range of species.

STEVE NEWMAN

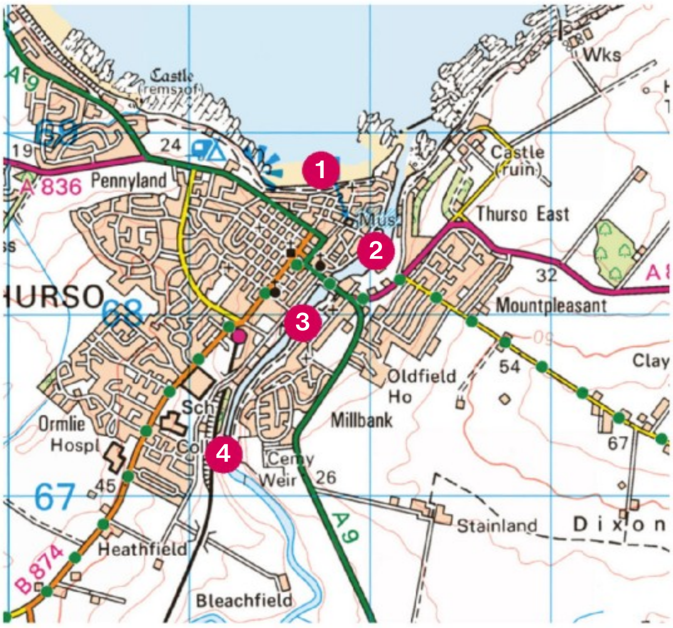
WHERE TO WATCH

1 The beach and river mouth offer large flocks of Redshank, Turnstone, Pied Wagtail and sea ducks such as Common Scoter and Eider. Black- and Red-throated Diver can also be seen. Puffins and Guillemots can be spotted offshore.

2 The footbridge midway beneath the town bridge and the river mouth overlooks the islands in the river, which contain a selection of gulls and waders. Black-headed Gulls and Arctic Terns frequently rest here, and on our visit in late October we had four Hooded Crows on the railings.

3 The islands in the park lake can give you unexpected sea ducks. We got Goldeneye and Tufted Duck and, amongst the gulls, a possible Glaucous Gull. In spring and summer, migrants can regularly be seen.

4 The circular river walk can be short or long as there two footbridges crossing the river. The north side is cut lawn giving way to shrub and grassland, while the south side passes beneath deciduous woodland. We managed Red-breasted Merganser, Grey Heron, Dipper and Great Spotted Woodpecker in this area.



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PRACTICAL INFO

POSTCODE: KW14 7DH

GRID REF: ND 114 681

MAPS: OS Explorer 451, OS Landranger 12

PARKING: Free parking around the town. Small free car park for six cars at the beach and one for 30 cars by the pedestrian bridge on the north side of the river near the estuary

TERRAIN: Flat with all tarmac paths

ACCESSIBILITY: Open all year round

FACILITIES: Shops, pubs and facilities are available in the town

INSIDER KNOWLEDGE

Seals haul out on the islands on the river below the town bridge

JOSH HARRISON/ALAMY

TARGET SPECIES

SPRING
- Puffin
- Wheatear
- Pied Wagtail

SUMMER
- Arctic Tern
- Eider
- Red-throated Diver

AUTUMN
- Snow Bunting
- Red-breasted Merganser
- Redwing

WINTER
- Black-throated Diver
- Greenshank
- White-tailed Eagle

HIGHLAND

GARBOLE

MAX MILES ON FOOT: 6 MIN TIME: 5 HOURS

Classic Highland birding in a spectacular setting

Garbole is about halfway along the winding road from Tomatin to Coignarfearn, and tracks the River Findhorn through a broad, glacial valley with wet meadows, rapids and islets. A mixture of scattered oak woods and dense pine plantations adds to the variety of habitats and a lane leads to an upland section of open moorland, bogs and craggy precipitous cliffs. In several places, babbling streams tumble from the hillside. The upland section is a tough walk with steep slopes and where Red Deer and Feral Goats are abundant and Mountain Hares are regularly encountered. For the botanist a range of sub-Alpine flowers should be looked for. The single-track road from Garbole, over the top towards Inverness is highly recommended for spectacular views across the Monadhliath Mountains, and is a favoured haunt of the Golden Eagle. There are few locations in the British Isles which exude such grandeur. It is an intensely spiritual place and to visit on a sunny day in early summer is to be in birding nirvana.

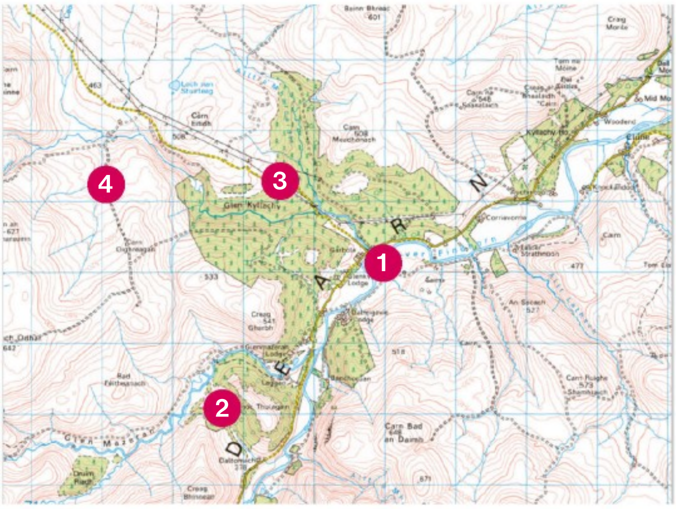
PAUL TRODD

Buzzard

PAPILIO/ALAMY

WHERE TO WATCH

1 From the road junction scan for Goosander and Goldeneye moving along the river, plus Pied and Grey Wagtails, Dipper and Common Sandpiper beside the margins and on rocks midstream. Large numbers of Swallows, House and Sand Martins swarm over the valley, hawking insects. Islands along the watercourse attract breeding Greylag Geese, Common and Black-headed Gulls. Check areas of rank grass and scrub for Whinchat, Yellowhammer and Reed Bunting along with Sedge Warbler, Whitethroat and the chance of a Grasshopper Warbler. Typical birds of prey include Kestrel, Sparrowhawk and Buzzard, plus the occasional passing Osprey or, increasingly, Red Kite. Barn Owl often haunt the river valley at dusk and Tawny Owl can be heard in adjacent woodland.



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2 Scattered oak woods attract a variety of upland passerines, with Willow Warbler, Chiffchaff, Blackcap and Siskin the most numerous. Summering Redstart, Tree Pipit and Spotted Flycatcher are also present, and there is a good chance of Cuckoo and maybe a breeding Redwing. Check the stoney brook tumbling down Glen Mazeran for Dipper and Grey Wagtail.

3 Conifer woods attract breeding Crossbills and Crested Tits, plus Lesser Repoll, Siskin, Goldcrest, Coal and Long-tailed Tits. A favoured area for Great Spotted Woodpecker, Jay and Mistle Thrush, while the woodland edge is good for Spotted Flycatcher. The boggy fields towards the lane can yield Black Grouse and at dusk the chance of a Long-eared Owl.

4 Anywhere along this upland section of the walk is good for breeding Red Grouse, Curlew, Golden Plover, Meadow Pipit, Sky Lark, Stonechat and Wheatear. The rocky slopes harbour a few Ring Ouzels while Merlin and Peregrine are the chief raptors. Golden Eagle, Buzzard and Red Kite are also present along with numerous corvids including Raven and Hooded Crow. Hen Harrier and Short-eared Owl are sometimes noted along the lane towards Farr.

PRACTICAL INFO

POSTCODE: IV13 7YA
GRID REF: NH 757 242
MAPS: OS Explorer 417, OS Landranger 35
PARKING: Park at Garbole by the river where a narrow lane heads north-west, signposted to Farr
TERRAIN: Level on the valley bottom, steep rocky tracks on the hillsides
ACCESSIBILITY: Year-round access
FACILITIES: None on site apart from a convenience store in Tomatin

INSIDER KNOWLEDGE

Regularly scan the skyline above upland ridges for soaring Golden Eagle

NATURE PHOTOGRAPHERS LTD/ALAMY

TARGET SPECIES

SPRING/SUMMER

- Goosander
- Goldeneye
- Peregrine
- Golden Eagle
- Osprey
- Common Sandpiper
- Red Grouse
- Dipper
- Grey Wagtail
- Redstart
- Tree Pipit
- Whinchat
- Grasshopper Warbler
- Ring Ouzel
- Crested Tit
- Hooded Crow
- Siskin

AUTUMN/WINTER

- White-tailed Eagle
- Woodcock
- Redwing
- Fieldfare
- Brambling

PERTHSHIRE

BAMFF

MAX MILES ON FOOT: 3 MIN TIME: 2 HOURS

See how Beavers have helped create great bird habitat

Wood Warbler

PHILIP MUGRIDGE/ALAMY

The Bamff estate has set itself out as a 'rewilding' project, with the Beavers doing most of the work! There is also mixed grazing, along with the forestry and self-catering lodges. With traditional farming all around it, it is a magnet for birds.

JOHN MILES

WHERE TO WATCH

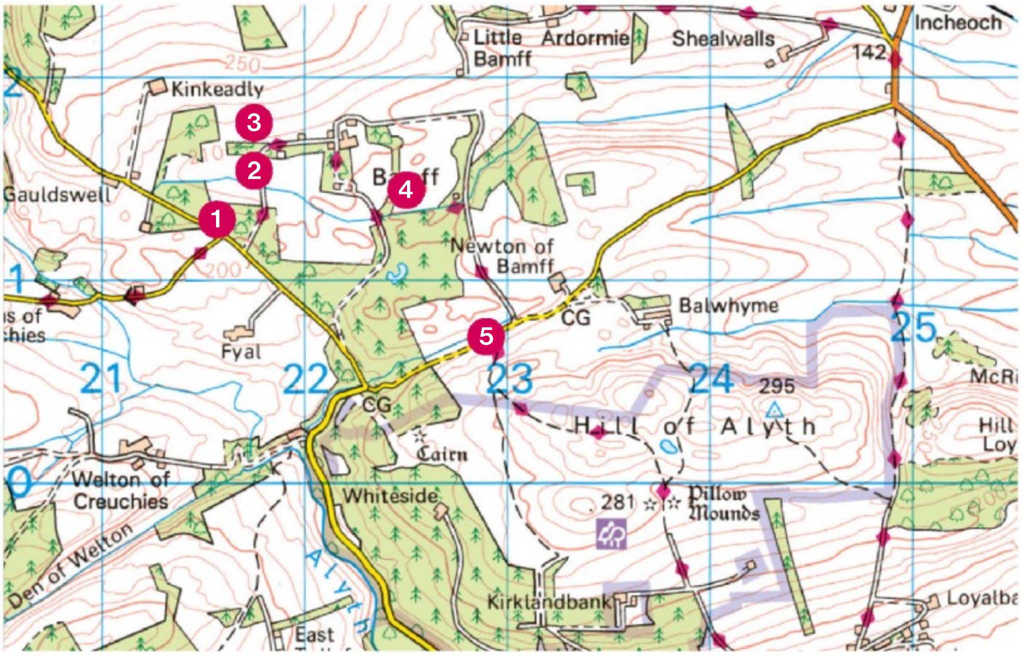
1 Parking by Gauldswell Wood, listen out for Wood Warbler in spring in the many Beech trees, and scan the fields for Red-legged Partridge, Yellowhammer and Linnets. Walk back down to the entrance to the estate and follow part of the 64-mile Cateran Trail into the estate.

2 It is not long before you start to see plenty of water in the ditches as the estate is famous for its Beavers. Of course, being nocturnal there is less chance of seeing them in full daylight, but the experience of seeing their work does make up for a lot. These wetlands encourage species like Reed Bunting, Whinchat and Sedge Warbler to use the vegetation around the wet areas. Grey Wagtail enjoys these wet areas as well.

3 Carry on along the track where it forks to the right, where you see more of the estate buildings and high onto the surrounding hills, where you may scan for birds of prey like Buzzard, Red Kite and Goshawk. Pied Wagtail, House Martin and Swallow use the residential areas while a mixture of thrushes use the many Rowans.

4 You drop down to another wet area where mature conifers like Norway and Sitka Spruce are scattered in this new wetland. Look out for Great Spotted Woodpecker, Treecreeper and Nuthatch along with Siskin and Crossbill in cone years. Sparrowhawks can use these areas and listen out for Cuckoo in summer along with Redstart and Spotted Flycatcher.

5 The trail now takes you out in open farmland where you meet a minor road and head right and tight again to complete the circular walk. Time to scan for birds of prey again, adding Kestrel or an Osprey heading to Lintrathen Reservoir.



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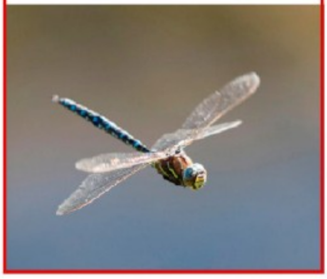
PRACTICAL INFO

POSTCODE: PH11 8LF
GRID REF: NO 222 517
MAPS: OS Explorer 381, OS Landranger 53
PARKING: The minor road has a wide verge in places so it is easy to park off the road
TERRAIN: Most of the walk can be done on estate tracks and roads, with one section of field
ACCESSIBILITY: All year round
FACILITIES: Alyth

INSIDER KNOWLEDGE

With all that water, a summer visit will give you plenty of dragonflies and damselflies to look for, so check out the Common Hawker (below)


MAURITIUS IMAGES GMBH/ALAMY

TARGET SPECIES

SPRING/SUMMER

- Spring/summer
- Cuckoo
- Whinchat
- Reed Bunting
- Wood Warbler
- Willow Warbler
- Garden Warbler
- Chiffchaff
- Blackcap
- Spotted Flycatcher
- Redstart

AUTUMN/WINTER

- Raven
- Carrion Crow
- Buzzard
- Kestrel
- Sparrowhawk
- Red Kite
- Goshawk
- Long-tailed Tit
- Coal Tit
- Treecreeper

DUMFRIES & GALLOWAY

MAX MILES ON FOOT: 0 MIN TIME: 3 HOURS

PENWHIRN RESERVOIR

From gulls to woodland birds from the comfort of the car

This can be a great way to add species to your trip to the Stranraer area, with some good birding all accessible by road – there's no need to do much, if any, walking.

JOHN MILES

Cuckoo

ALANTOOKTHIS/ALAMY

WHERE TO WATCH

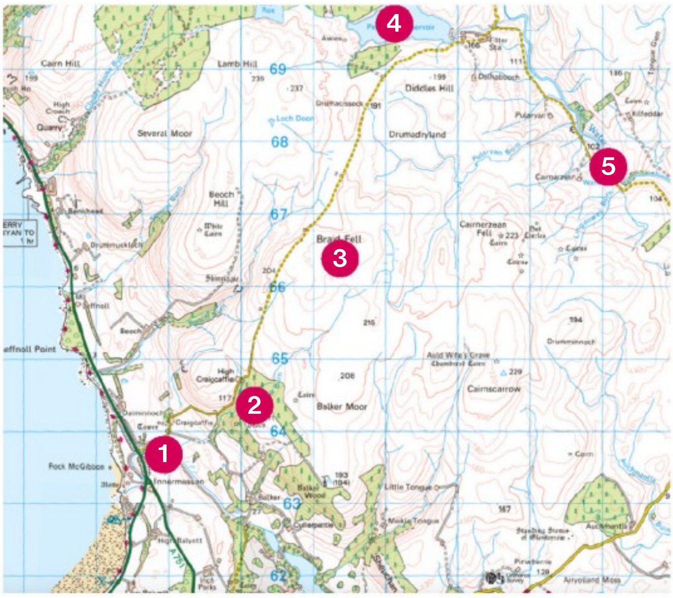
1 Here is a minor road which takes you from Loch Ryan straight into woodland and then moorland and even a reservoir to boot! It can even be used as a circular run coming back by Castle Kennedy and back to Loch Ryan.

2 This is a steep rise passing through/by a conifer wood which offers you the classic woodland species like Great Spotted Woodpecker, Treecreeper, mixed tits and local thrushes. Check for both Sparrowhawk and Buzzard circling in spring, and the sound of mixed finches, especially Siskin, Redpoll and even Crossbill, in cone years.

3 You'll soon reach the moorland, so use the passing places to scan for moorland birds with summer being the ideal time for species like Whinchat, Cuckoo, Meadow Pipit and even raptors like Hen Harrier and Merlin. Some of the area has been damaged by Sikta Spruce 'regen' dominating the heather.

4 Fresh water so close to Loch Ryan can draw gulls, and this reservoir has its own colony of Common Gulls nesting along the dam. Lesser Black-backed Gulls try to join the colony and even Herring Gulls, especially immature birds, can be found along the water. Both Greylag and Canada Geese use the area, with a mixture of ducks especially in winter, with Mallard, Teal and Wigeon possible. Whooper Swans can drop in on migration while Ospreys pass over, with some breeding birds in the area.

5 If you decide to carry on along the minor road, you come to an area of Scots Pine and broadleaved woodland by the road where you can find winter thrushes feeding on the Rowan and Hawthorn berries, but with mixed warblers come the summer. Redstarts use the holes in the Birch, while Willow and Garden Warblers use the scrub, along with Blackcaps. Ravens are often here and the River Luce has both Dipper and Grey Wagtail. More woodland can be found downstream, with large conifer woods as well, driving back by turning at New Luce for Castle Kennedy and the A75.



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PRACTICAL INFO

POSTCODE: DG9 8RS
GRID REF: NX 126 694
MAPS: OS Explorer 309, OS Landranger 82
PARKING: Use passing places without blocking them. Rough parking by the dam
TERRAIN: Mainly a single track road, little walking needed.
ACCESSIBILITY: All year round
FACILITIES: Stranraer

INSIDER KNOWLEDGE

Look out for butterflies in summer with chance of Dark Green and Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary, Small Heath (below) and even Green Hairstreak

BLICKWINKEL/ALAMY

TARGET SPECIES

SPRING/SUMMER

- Spring/summer
- Common Gull
- Herring Gull
- Lesser Black-backed Gull
- Merlin
- Osprey
- Whinchat
- Cuckoo
- Willow Warbler
- Garden Warbler
- Blackcap
- Redstart

AUTUMN/WINTER

- Hen Harrier
- Sparrowhawk
- Buzzard
- Kestrel
- Stonechat
- Raven
- Carrion Crow
- Redpoll
- Siskin
- Dipper

➤

CUMBRIA

MAX MILES ON FOOT: 4 MIN TIME: 2 HOURS

ANTHORN

A wealth of birding on the Solway Firth

Kestrel

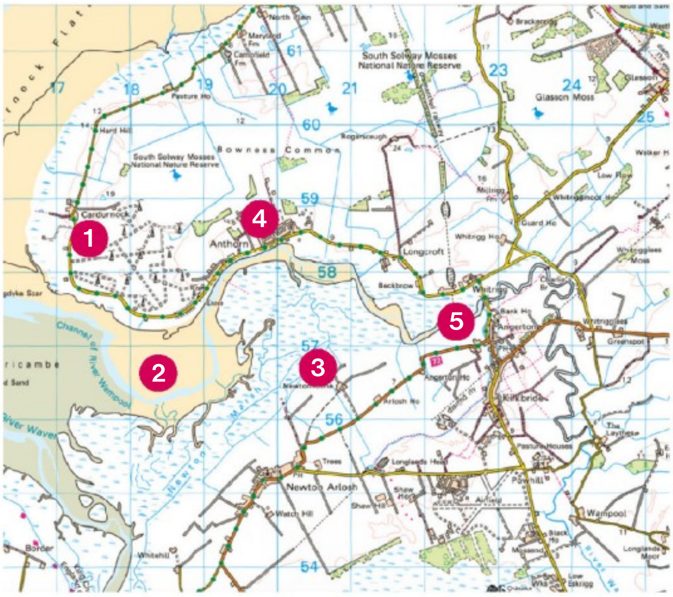
IAN BUTLER PHOTOGRAPHY/ALAMY

This section of the Inner Solway Firth has an easy road to follow, giving you ideal views of potential birds. The verges are quite wide so you can stop at will. Anthorn was home to an airfield where planes such as Gannets flew from.

JOHN MILES

WHERE TO WATCH

1 One thing you cannot miss round here are the Anthorn Masts. These former submarine detection masts offer some short turf where many Golden Plover and Lapwing gather in winter. You can scan through them as oddments like Ruff, Dotterel, and even American Golden Plover have been found. The other side of the road can have both Pinkfeet and Barnacle Geese feeding, with mixed waders.



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2 Hawthorn and Gorse screen you from the marshes now but look out for Stonechat, Yellowhammer and Reed Bunting here, checking for gaps in the screen to scan the marsh and estuary. If the Golden Plovers are not by the masts they can be on the estuary at low tide, with up to 4,000 counted. Mixed waders use the mud as well.

3 You are now following the channel of the Wampool, with Newton Marsh on the other side. You need to scan this area as thousands of Barnacle and Pink-footed Geese can be here, along with the odd European Whitefront or even a Bean Goose. Check the posts for a sitting Merlin or Peregrine. Even a hunting harrier may be here, as now both Marsh and Hen Harrier use the area.

4 The channel itself holds a mixture of waders which can differ through the year. Redshank and Oystercatcher can be the main ones but Dunlin, Bar-tailed and Black-tailed Godwit, Curlew Sandpiper and even Little Stint have been found. Long-billed Dowitcher used to come in twos but last time there was just the one. Wagtails use the grassland, with Yellow Wagtail now a rare bird.

5 The large open areas of Angerton and Whitrigg Marsh can have plenty of geese, with Red-breasted seen here, but the next big birds using the area are Whooper Swans, with more than 500 counted in this area. The Wampool bridge is a place to look for egrets and other waders like Common and Green Sandpiper in summer and autumn. Wheatears pass through while Sedge Warblers breed along the river.

PRACTICAL INFO

POSTCODE: CA7 5AN
GRID REF: NY 196 581
MAPS: OS Explorer 314, OS Landranger 85
TERRAIN: Little walking needed as your car acts as a hide
ACCESSIBILITY: All year round
FACILITIES: Kirkbride

INSIDER KNOWLEDGE

Military buildings are found back from the road so look out for Barn Owl on an evening

DAVID TIPLING PHOTO LIBRARY/ALAMY

TARGET SPECIES

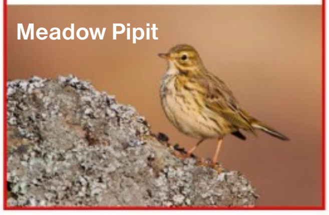
SPRING/SUMMER

- Spring/summer
- Wheatear
- Cuckoo
- Willow Warbler
- Linnet
- Sky Lark
- Meadow Pipit
- Pied Wagtail
- White Wagtail
- Marsh Harrier
- Kestrel

AUTUMN/WINTER

- Barnacle Goose
- Pink-footed Goose
- Curlew
- Oystercatcher
- Bar-tailed Godwit
- Redshank
- Dunlin
- Golden Plover
- Lapwing
- Ringed Plover

Meadow Pipit



WILDLIFE GMBH/ALAMY

NORTH YORKSHIRE

MAX MILES ON FOOT: 8 MIN TIME: 10 HOURS

VALLEY OF DESOLATION

A beautiful walk despite the rather unpromising name

Redstart

OUR WILD LIFE PHOTOGRAPHY/ALAMY

Starting and ending on the Bolton Abbey estate, this is a lovely circular walk featuring woodland, a tranquil valley, dramatic hidden waterfall, open moorland, and meadows by the River Wharfe. It's best to do this walk in early summer, when the breeding birds are present and the paths are dry.

PAUL BROOK

WHERE TO WATCH

1 From Riverside Car Park, cross the bridge and follow signs uphill to the Valley of Desolation and Simon's Seat. The valley owes its name to a great storm in 1826, but there's nothing desolate about it now – it's lush, green, and has a spectacular waterfall hidden among the trees. Around the woodland edges, you may find Redstarts, Blackcaps, Willow Warblers and Chiffchaffs.

2 Follow the narrow path up through the valley until you reach the edge of a plantation, where there are Siskins and Goldcrests. Where the treeline ends, listen for Garden Warblers and possibly Tree Pipits.

3 The path continues uphill towards Simon's Seat, with Meadow Pipits and Red Grouse popping up from the heather, and Curlews calling. Enjoy the views from the rocky outcrop, before heading down towards Howgill.

4 The riverside route takes you to Barden Bridge – look for Common Sandpipers, Dippers and Grey Wagtails.

5 Follow the path back to Cavendish Pavilion through Strid Wood, famous for Pied Flycatchers and other woodland birds. Look out for Mandarins and Goosanders along the river.

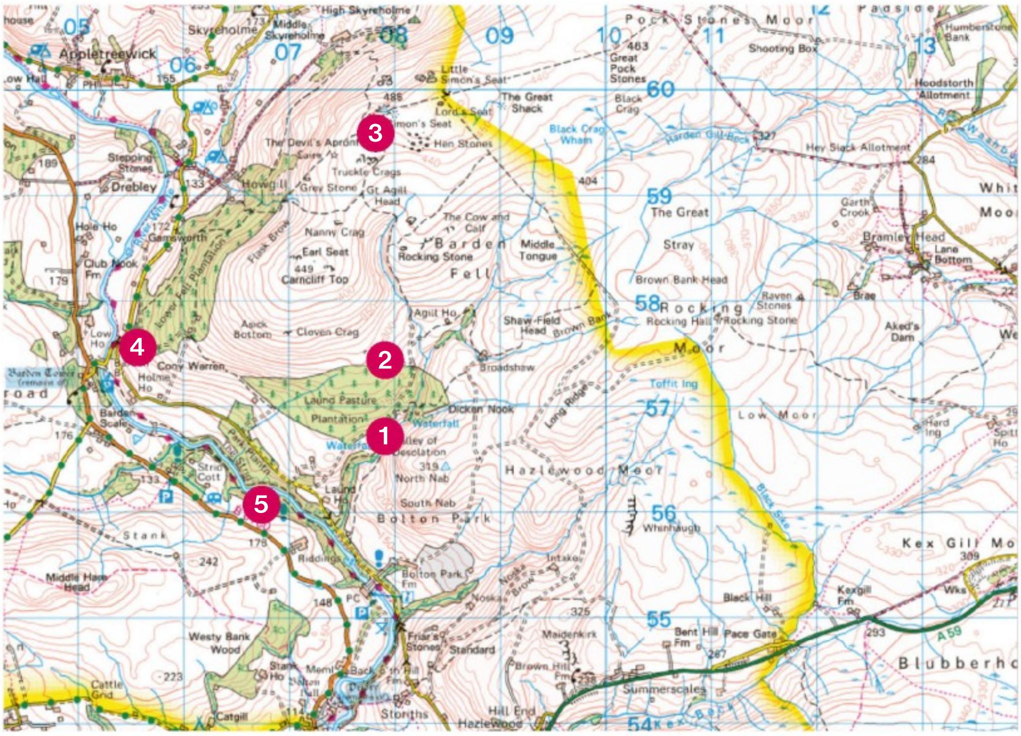
PRACTICAL INFO

POSTCODE: BD23 6AN (Bolton Abbey Riverside Car Park)
GRID REF: SE 079 548
MAPS: OS Explorer OL2, OS Landranger 104
PARKING: Park at Riverside Car Park (£15 charge)
TERRAIN: Hilly, with narrow, unsurfaced paths in places.
ACCESSIBILITY: The car park is open at 9am, with last admissions at 5.30pm, and is locked at 7pm.
FACILITIES: Toilets and café at Cavendish Pavilion, next to the car park

INSIDER KNOWLEDGE

Around the summit of Simon's Seat, look for breeding Golden Plovers in their spring finery

NATURE PICTURE LIBRARY/ALAMY



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TARGET SPECIES

SPRING/SUMMER

- Redstart
- Pied Flycatcher
- Spotted Flycatcher
- Common Sandpiper
- Golden Plover
- Curlew
- Sand Martin
- Green Woodpecker
- Garden Warbler
- Siskin
- Blackcap
- Whitethroat
- Meadow Pipit

AUTUMN/WINTER

- Red Grouse
- Dipper
- Nuthatch
- Mandarin
- Goosander
- Red Kite

CAMBRIDGESHIRE

MAX MILES ON FOOT: 1.5 MIN TIME: 3 HOURS

MAXEY CUT

Find declining farmland birds at this varied site

Woodgate Lane is really a track which leads nearly 1km south of the east-west High Street through the centre of the small village of Maxey. It provides access to the Maxey Cut (of the River Welland), the banks of which are renowned as a remaining north Cambs stronghold for the rapidly declining Turtle Dove. The associated pits are good for water birds and the surrounding vegetation abounds with warblers in summer.

MIKE WEEDON

Turtle Dove

ANDREW DARRINGTON/ALAMY

WHERE TO WATCH

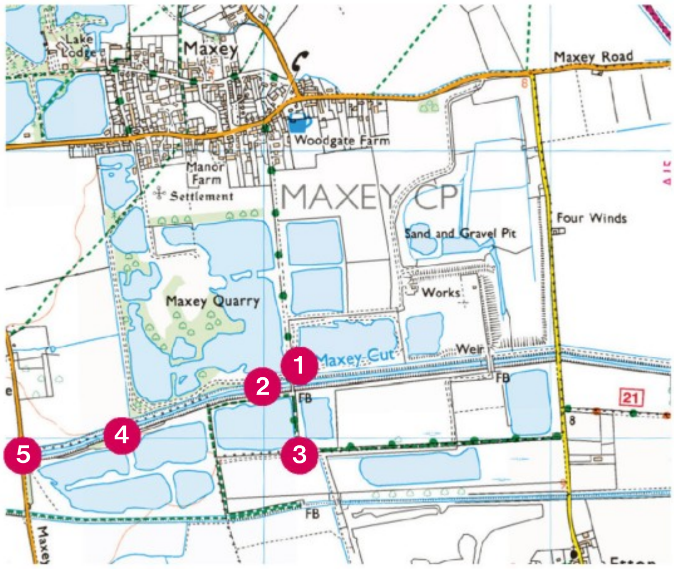
1 The parking area. The track widens a little at the southern end, by the green metal footbridge over the Maxey Cut, allowing parking for a few cars. The bushes and trees near here have abundant singing warblers, including Lesser Whitethroat and Garden Warbler, while leaving the car is the first chance to listen for the purring of Turtle Dove, from early May into the summer. It is always worth checking Gerard's Carp Lake to the east of the parking area for ducks, grebes and terns. On the west side of the road, the larger private lake has potential for Bittern and even feeding Osprey on occasions.

2 The south side of the Maxey Cut. View the cut from the bridge or from the south side, looking for egrets (including Great White), as well as Kingfisher, Common Tern etc. In recent years, Goosanders have nested somewhere along the Cut, and family groups of ducklings can sometimes be seen with their mother from here. It is possible to hear Turtle Doves along the length of the Maxey Cut, and they can be seen on wires or trees or anywhere in the vicinity. In winter, impressive Starling murmurations gather on the pits north of the Maxey Cut.

3 Grebe Pit. Walking south from the bridge, if there is a break in the vegetation, check the pit to the east (called Birch Pit) for ducks and Little Grebe and the pit to the west (Grebe Pit) from the south-east corner (limited view) also for waterfowl. This pit has traditionally been very good for Little Grebe, and has twice had Red-necked Grebe in winter, in recent years.

4 The more westerly pits. A walk along the raised bank of the Maxey Cut leads past some more pits, worth scanning for ducks, terns, Sand Martins etc. Listen for warblers, including Cetti's Warblers. In early May, scan bushes for Whinchats (scarce) and the ground for a chance of Wheatear. Tall, dead-looking trees are a favourite refuge of resting Cormorants and, particularly in autumn, have attracted Ospreys on occasion. In summer, Hobbies may be seen hunting over the pits. Red Kites and Buzzards are common. Early mornings (highly recommended) and evenings may produce hunting Barn Owls.

5 Maxey Road bridge. The shallows near the bridge are good for searching for Grey Wagtail.



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PRACTICAL INFO

POSTCODE: PE6 9EB (Maxey High Street)
GRID REF: TF 131 072
MAPS: OS Explorer 235, OS Landranger 142
PARKING: Limited parking at south end of Woodgate Lane
TERRAIN: Road is rough (drive slowly); grassy banks of Maxey Cut
ACCESSIBILITY: Public road open all year. Pathway always open
FACILITIES: Nearest food and drink is 900m north from parking area

INSIDER KNOWLEDGE

Like many waterways in this area, Otters can be seen on occasion hunting along the Maxey Cut

DAVID CHAPMAN/ALAMY

TARGET SPECIES

SPRING/SUMMER

- Little Grebe
- Bittern
- Little Egret
- Goosander
- Red Kite
- Hobby
- Common Tern
- Turtle Dove
- Sand Martin
- Grey Wagtail
- Warblers
- Whinchat
- Wheatear
- Reed Bunting

AUTUMN/WINTER

- Great White Egret
- Osprey
- Barn Owl
- Siskin
- Redpoll
- Long-tailed Tit
- Lesser Redpoll

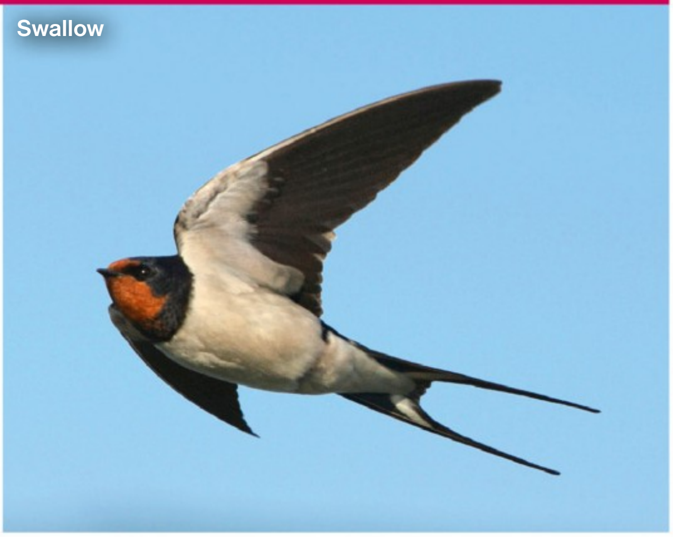
In association with Ordnance Survey
os.uk/osm

CAMBRIDGESHIRE

MAX MILES ON FOOT: 1 MIN TIME: 1.5 HOURS

HOLT ISLAND

An oasis of tranquility in the centre of town



NATURE PHOTOGRAPHERS LTD/ALAMY

Situated in the centre of the Cambridgeshire town of St Ives, the island was used to grow willow for the basket weaving industry up until the 1970s, then became overgrown and neglected. It is now a wet woodland nature reserve providing a sanctuary for a wide variety of birds including Kingfisher, Great Spotted Woodpecker and various warblers, who are attracted to the Osier beds, reedbeds and woodland. There is a raised boardwalk around the island allowing the site to be accessible for all; as well as seating, picnic tables and the Holt cabin, which holds a wide variety of information plus a nature table. Access is available between 10am and 4pm during April to October or at other times via key (refundable deposit required) from One Leisure or the Norris Museum in St Ives. The entrance is via a small white bridge from near All Saints Church.

ABIGAIL HAMILTON-THOMPSON

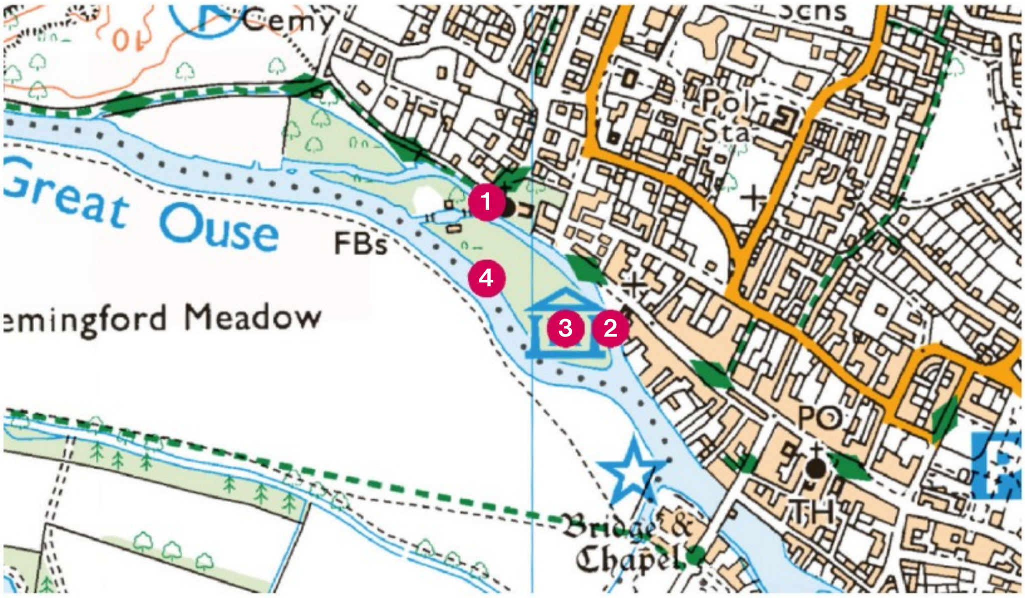
WHERE TO WATCH

1 Cross the bridge into the reserve and head left following the back water. Look out here for one of the highlights of the island, the Kingfisher who can often be seen darting along the channel. Occasionally there may be a Little Egret lurking in the reeds. Listen out for the distinctive drumming sounds of the Great Spotted Woodpecker among the woodland here.

2 The Osier beds and reedbeds just past the meadow support a number of varied species of waterfowl such as Mallards, Moorhens, Little and Great Crested Grebes, and Cormorant. In the summer, look out for several different varieties of warbler, including Garden, Willow, Reed and Sedge, as well as Reed Bunting.

3 The meadow area is where you may encounter finches, tits, Dunnocks, Blackcap, Chiffchaff and Siskin, as well as have the chance to see birds of prey such as Buzzard, Red Kite and Kestrel.

4 Head round to the right to walk alongside the River Great Ouse, where you may see summer visitors such as Swallow, Swift, House and Sand Martin chasing insects attracted to the edges of the water, whereas in the winter the island becomes a refuge for migratory birds such as Redwing and Fieldfare.



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PRACTICAL INFO

POSTCODE: PE27 6DG
GRID REF: TL 309 716
MAPS: OS Explorer 225, OS Landranger 153
PARKING: None available, use One Leisure car park on Westwood Road close by
TERRAIN: Raised boardwalk and grassy paths
ACCESSIBILITY: Open 10am-4pm, April to October; key can be obtained from One Leisure or Norris Museum at all other times (deposit required)
FACILITIES: Nature table, picnic tables, benches

INSIDER KNOWLEDGE

You may be lucky enough to see Mink, Otter or even a Grey Seal in this area

ABIGAIL HAMILTON-THOMPSON

TARGET SPECIES

SPRING/SUMMER

- Swallow
- Swift
- House Martin
- Sand Martin
- Whitethroat
- Blackcap
- Chiffchaff
- Sedge Warbler
- Reed Warbler
- Willow Warbler
- Garden Warbler
- Little Egret
- Goldcrest
- Treecreeper
- Great Crested Grebe

AUTUMN/WINTER

- Redwing
- Fieldfare
- Siskin
- Common Gull
- Great Spotted Woodpecker
- Green Woodpecker
- Cormorant
- Kingfisher
- Reed Bunting

WARWICKSHIRE

MAX MILES ON FOOT: 4 MIN TIME: 3 HOURS

ILMINGTON HILL

Look for migrants at an underwatched landmark

Long-tailed Tit

MIKE LANE/ALAMY

This is the highest point in Warwickshire, and commands great views towards the Cotswolds, the Vale of Evesham and well beyond, but it is relatively unwatched by birders. In spring, it's a great place to stroll and catch up with arriving migrants such as warblers, and possible passage migrants, too.

MATT MERRITT

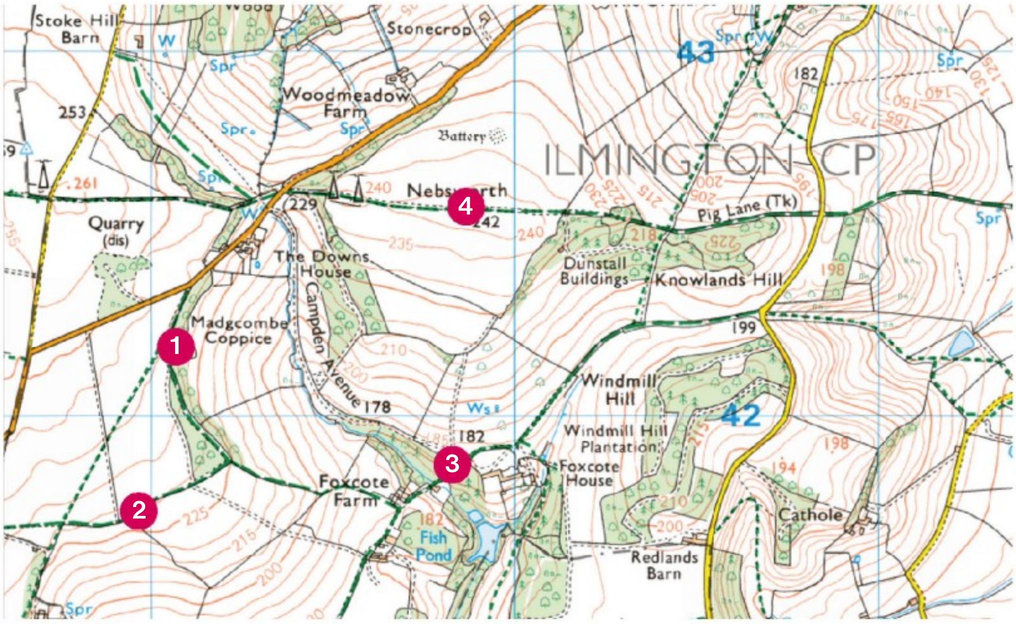
WHERE TO WATCH

1 Park safely and considerately at the pull-in, and then walk through Madgcombe Coppice. Look and listen for warblers such as Blackcap, Garden Warbler and Chiffchaff, plus Willow Warbler during passage periods, along with common woodland species such as Great, Blue, Coal and Long-tailed Tits, and Chaffinch, Greenfinch and Goldfinch. In winter, Bramblings are possible with finch flocks, and Great Spotted Woodpecker, Nuthatch and Treecreeper are all likely, plus Sparrowhawks often hunt here.

2 Take a slight detour to check the slopes here – during migration periods, Wheatear and Ring Ouzel are possible, while in winter Redwings and Fieldfares are often around in good numbers. Check isolated bushes and hedgerows for Whitethroat in summer, as well as possible Stonechat.

3 The stream near Foxcote Farm can hold Grey Wagtail, while the wooded area here can contain many of the same species as Madgcombe Coppice.

4 As you walk back towards the road, look again for passage visitors such as Wheatear and Ring Ouzel, while Sky Lark and Meadow Pipit are both likely. Look overhead for Kestrel, Buzzard and Red Kite.


Stoke Hill Barn
Stonecrop
Woodmeadow Farm
253
261
Quarry (dis)
Battery
ILMINGTON CP
43
182
Nebsworth
229
240
242
4
The Downs House
Campden Avenue
Madgcombe Coppice
1
Dunstall Buildings
Knowlands Hill
Pig Lane (Tk)
199
Windmill Hill
178
182
3
Windmill Hill Plantation
Foxcote House
42
Foxcote Farm
Fish Pond
Redlands Barn
Catholé
2

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PRACTICAL INFO

POSTCODE: CV 36 4LH (this is Campden Hill in Ilmington)
GRID REF: SP 191 423
MAPS: OS Explorer 205, OS Landranger 151
PARKING: There's a pull-in at SP 191 423, or you can park considerately in Ilmington and start the walk from there
TERRAIN: Footpaths can get muddy, and there are some steep slopes
ACCESSIBILITY: All hours, year-round
FACILITIES: Ilmington village has two pubs and a shop

INSIDER KNOWLEDGE

Visit during a period of prolonged southerly and south-westerly winds, for maximum migrant action

TARGET SPECIES

SPRING/SUMMER

- Sky Lark
- Meadow Pipit
- Blackcap
- Garden Warbler
- Whitethroat
- Chiffchaff
- Willow Warbler
- Buzzard
- Red Kite
- Kestrel
- Grey Wagtail

AUTUMN/WINTER

- Redwing
- Fieldfare
- Chaffinch
- Greenfinch
- Goldfinch
- Great Spotted Woodpecker
- Treecreeper
- Long-tailed Tit
- Nuthatch
- Brambling
- Sparrowhawk

Grey Wagtail

WILDLIFE GMBH/ALAMY

HAMPSHIRE

MAX MILES ON FOOT: 4 MIN TIME: 4 HOURS

KEYHAVEN

Waders and wildfowl at this south coast birding haven

Black-tailed Godwits

PAUL TRODD

This extensive area of wetlands beside the Solent includes Keyhaven Marshes, managed by the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, complete with lagoons, wet grasslands and reedbeds. A range of waders, wildfowl and seabirds is assured through the year with the autumn passage period being the most likely to turn up a rarity.

PAUL TRODD

WHERE TO WATCH

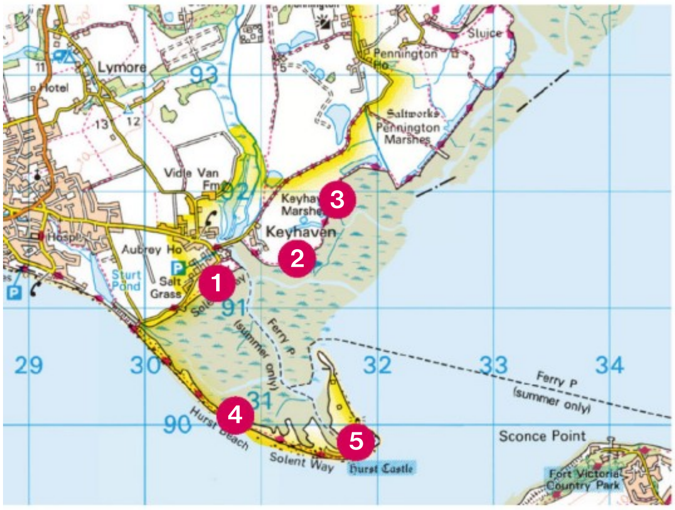
1 From the viewpoint where the Avon Water flows into the harbour, scan for Grey Heron, Little Egret, Kingfisher, Grey Wagtail and Green Sandpiper, while Turnstone, Redshank and Oystercatcher feed around the ferry berth.

2 Trees by the sea wall support Green and Great Spotted Woodpeckers, Mistle Thrush, Jay, Treecreeper, tits, finches, thrushes, plus summering Chiffchaff and Blackcap, and in autumn passage warblers and Goldcrests. Another opportunity to scan the mudflats for waders and wildfowl.

3 Keyhaven Marshes is best at high tide for shorebirds, including Lapwing, Snipe, Black-tailed Godwit, Little Ringed Plover, Greenshank, Wood, Green and Common Sandpipers, plus a chance of scarcer species such as Whimbrel, Curlew Sandpiper, Little Stint, Spotted Redshank and Ruff. Little Grebe, Teal, Shoveler and Gadwall occur among the ranks of common ducks and geese. Check around grazing animals for flocks of Yellow Wagtails, Starlings, Meadow Pipits and maybe a party of Cattle Egrets. Reed margins lure Cetti's, Sedge and Reed Warblers, Reed Bunting and Kingfisher, along with Grey Heron, Great White and Little Egrets. Dry scrub is good for Whitethroat, Linnet and Goldfinch, plus the chance of a rarity on passage. Kestrel, Buzzard, Marsh Harrier and Hobby are often present, along with the occasional migrant Osprey and, at dusk, Barn Owl.

4 Check the shingle bar on the seaward side for summering Ringed Plover and Oystercatcher, plus passage Sanderling and Dunlin. Terns and gulls fish offshore while the strandline can attract Pied and Grey Wagtails, Meadow Pipit and the occasional Wheatear. At low tide, scan the mudflat creeks for Little Egret, Grey Heron, Shelduck and waders, typically Avocet, Oystercatcher, Redshank, Curlew, Bar-tailed and Black-tailed Godwits and, as the season progresses, Brent Geese, Wigeon, Knot, Grey Plover and Dunlin. Sandbars attract flocks of Cormorants, gulls, terns and the occasional Spoonbill. Peregrine are often present.

5 Scan the Solent channel from the old pier. Common, Sandwich and Little Terns are likely from late summer, plus the chance of a passing Black or Roseate Tern and Arctic Skua. Check the Black-headed and Common Gulls for Med and Yellow-legged Gulls. A good spot for hirundines and Swifts heading out, and grounded migrants such as Wheatear, Black Redstart, Meadow Pipit and Yellow Wagtail. As autumn progresses Gannet, Kittiwake, Brent Goose, divers and auks are possible.



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PRACTICAL INFO

POSTCODE: SO41 0UN
GRID REF: SZ 305 914
MAPS: OS Explorer OL22, OS Landranger 196
PARKING: Park in the Shipwright Walk car park off Keyhaven Road
TERRAIN: A variety of footpaths, some unsurfaced and muddy, but all on level ground
ACCESSIBILITY: Year-round access on public footpaths
FACILITIES: Beach café and toilets, and interpretive boards. The Gun Inn in Keyhaven village is highly recommended

INSIDER KNOWLEDGE

Make your way to the Hurst Castle spit for a spot of seawatching if onshore winds are forecast

TARGET SPECIES

SUMMER/AUTUMN

- Hobby
- Spoonbill
- Little Ringed Plover
- Black-tailed Godwit
- Avocet
- Whimbrel
- Greenshank
- Little Stint
- Curlew Sandpiper
- Wood Sandpiper
- Mediterranean Gull
- Yellow-legged Gull
- Sandwich and Little Terns
- Wheatear
- Whinchat
- Yellow Wagtail

WINTER

- Red-throated Diver
- Slavonian Grebe
- Brent Goose
- Shelduck
- Wigeon
- Pintail
- Common Scoter
- Knot
- Bar-tailed Godwit
- Short-eared Owl

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SERIES 5

Close Focus (both models): 1.9m
F.O.V. (8x42 model): 142m@1000m
Weight: 794g

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Review by Dr Neil English

SERIES 8

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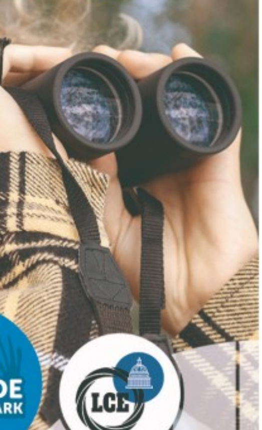
www.birdwatchingbreaks.com



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TOP BRANDS

BY CAR
The Satnav postcode SO50 5PE brings you to our main entrance. From J5 on the M27 follow Eastleigh A335 (Wide Lane) signs for ½ mile. The park entrance is on the left-hand side, just past the playing fields.

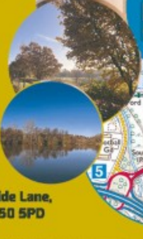
PARKING: Parking is free all day on weekends.

BY TRAIN
Our nearest stop is Southampton Airport Parkway station - a five-minute walk from the park entrance. Turn right on leaving the station, cross the main road on the pelican crossing and head towards Eastleigh. The entrance is ¼ mile on your left.

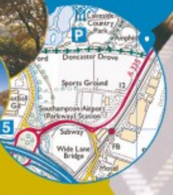
BY FOOT
We are approximately 20 minutes' walk from Eastleigh Town Centre following the High Street.
A public footpath enters the Park from Monks Way off Chestnut Avenue.

BY BIKE
From Eastleigh Town Centre pick up cycle-way signs for Southampton, once you pass the Concorde Club turn left over the ford. Alternatively, access the Park via Monks Way Open Space, off Monks Way.

at **Lakeside Centre,**
Lakeside Country Park, Wide Lane,
Eastleigh, Hampshire, SO50 5PD



LAKESIDE COUNTRY PARK



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YOUR VIEW

PHOTOS, LETTERS, TWEETS, QUESTIONS – HAVE YOUR SAY

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Nesting Great Northern Divers

ROBERTA OLENICK, ALL CANADA PHOTOS/ALAMY

Great Northern

Thank you for the April issue of *Bird Watching*. We read Mike's Weedon's World column about a Great Northern Diver's appearance at Ferry Meadows. We were surprised to see no mention of the Arthur Ransome story, Great Northern, first published in 1947. His last 'Swallows and Amazons' book, it dealt with the battle between conservation ornithologists of the time and the collectors of dead birds whose motto, quoted in the book, was "What's hit's history; What's missed's mystery".

At the time, it appears there was no record of a Great Northern Diver nesting in the British Isles. On a sailing cruise in the Hebrides, young Dick sees a pair on an island loch. He needs confirmation of his sighting, and has heard that there is a bird expert with a big boat in the area. When he sees the man, he realises that he is an egg- and dead bird-collector on a large scale. When the man hears about the first nesting GNDs he immediately wants to know the location so that *he* can take the credit for it. Dick is horrified and the rest of the story concerns the ongoing feud, in which the young folk, assisted by Captain Flint and the local Gaelic landowners, defeat the evil collector.

I am sure many of your older readers will remember this story, as Ransome was one of the best-selling authors of children's books in the 1940s and 1950s, and there is still an Arthur Ransome society to this day. Many thanks for your excellent magazine.

Reader Shots

WE LOVE...
The piercing eye of the Black-necked Grebe

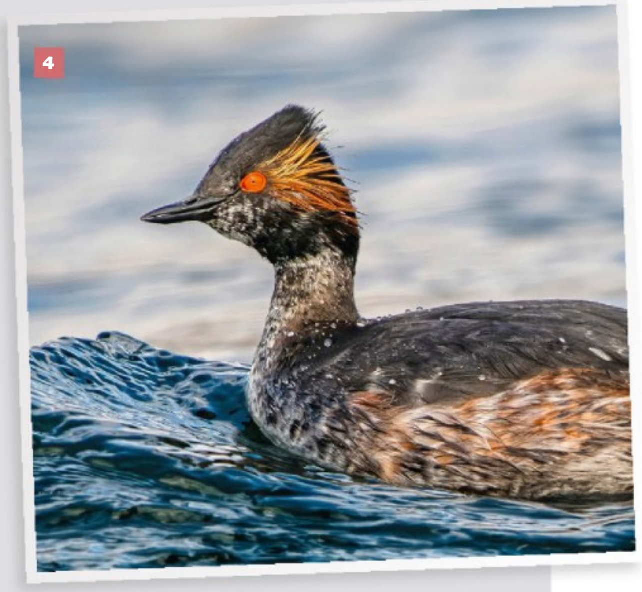
Send your snaps to birdwatching@bauermedia.co.uk to be in with a chance of seeing your photo in print. All images should be high resolution JPEG files.

1 Great Crested Grebes
by Stuart Spelling

2 Purple Sandpiper
by Jonathan Hedgecock

3 Black Redstart
by Stuart Spelling

4 Black-necked Grebe
by Paul Combes



PICS FROM OUR FACEBOOK GROUP

birdwatching.co.uk/my-200-sign-up/

Join our dedicated #My200BirdYear Facebook group and share your best birding experiences and images with the community:

facebook.com/groups/My200BirdYear

Great White Egret by Mark Howarth

Stonechat by Mitch Harris

Black-tailed Godwit by Jay Thomas

Dipper by David Betteridge

Bo's Green Woodpecker tale was well received

ARTERRA PICTURE LIBRARY/ALAMY

NEWS & OPINION

Grumpy Old Birder

Spreading the love of birdwatching to others is as rewarding as seeing birds, writes Bo

BAUER MEDIA

Bo's latest piece

Birds never let you down, like a loyal dog, getting you through tough times in life.
David Thomas

Dunlin (this one in black-bellied breeding plumage)

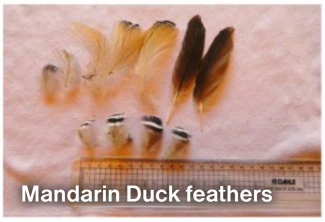
OUR WILD LIFE PHOTOGRAPHY/ALAMY

Dunlins (and godwits)

I enjoyed Dominic Couzens' article in the April magazine about Dunlin and their various associations. On my local reserve (I'm lucky enough to live right by WWT's Welney reserve) we get spectacular flocks of Icelandic Black-tailed Godwit, and as often as not there will be small numbers of Dunlin foraging around their long legs, their winter grey-and-white colouring so similar.
A few days ago, I was watching the breathtaking aerobatics of a flock of about 300 or so godwits, put up by a Marsh Harrier. The white bellies and wing bars of the godwits were catching the sun at every turn. Keeping up easily with the twists and turns of their big relatives were the diminutive forms of the Dunlin; seeing these valiant little birds made me smile in appreciation!
I have always admired them, especially when relating their small size to the incredible migratory journeys they make.
Karen Fleming

Your Questions

Send all your birding questions to birdwatching@bauermedia.co.uk and our experts will give you the answers



Mandarin Duck feathers

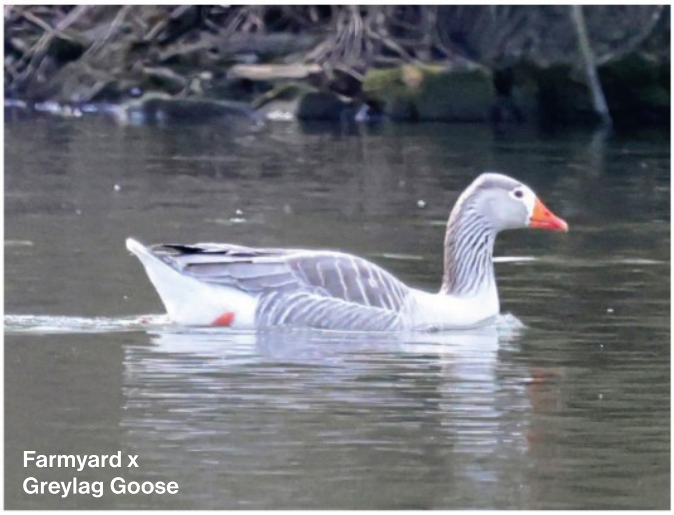
ALLEN BEALES

Mystery feathers

Q I am hoping you can help me with identifying the feathers in the attached photograph. On 21 March, I was walking around Lynford Arboretum, north of Thetford, when I came across an obvious bird kill; no corpse, only a mass of feathers. I have tried to establish which bird was the victim but it is beyond my capabilities. The combination of the colours has me foxed. Any ideas, please?

Allen Beales

A Your feathers look to have come from a drake Mandarin Duck, Allen. Arguably the most distinctive feathers are the black-and-white striped ones, from the front of the Mandarin's flanks.



Farmyard x Greylag Goose

KEN ALLSEBROOK

Goose enquiry

Q At Poolsbrook Country Park we saw Greylag Geese and Canada Geese and, among them, was the attached bird. The bird was very pale in comparison with the Greylags and I wondered if it's some sort of hybrid? Or could there be another reason for its pale colour, please?

Ken Allsebrook

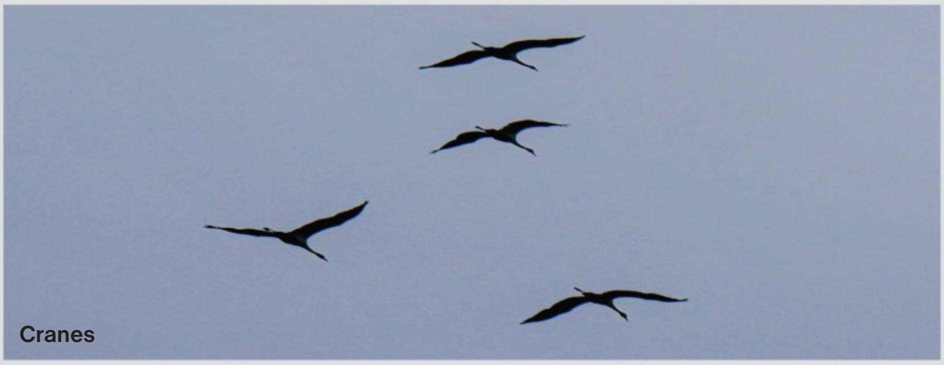
A Greylag Geese were the wild ancestors of domestic geese, which, through selective breeding, come in various colour forms, most notably white. It's most likely your bird has a mixed heritage of 'wild' (probably naturalised) Greylag and domestic Greylag of the white farmyard variety. Such 'mixed' birds are not uncommon in Greylag flocks, just as ducks with domestic ancestry are found among wild Mallards.

Are these storks?

Q While out walking I saw these birds flying and immediately thought they were unusual, as the more common wading birds fly with their necks scrunched up. I live in north Dorset and have no idea what they are as I haven't seen any of these at any of the local sites. Are they storks of some sort?

Benjamin Paynter

A Thanks for your email and photograph of the long-necked, long-legged birds you saw flying over north Dorset. Your birds are not storks, though, they are in fact Cranes! Perhaps the easiest way to tell Cranes from storks (which are both huge and have long straight necks in flight) in silhouette is that the bills are much shorter in Cranes (while they are long and thick-based in storks).



Cranes

BENJAMIN PAYNTER

Bird Watching

Bird Watching
JUNE ISSUE
ON SALE
MAY 15

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RUTH
MILLER

Headbanger crows!

Corvids knocking at the cottage door? **Ruth Miller** investigates some strange avian behaviour…

As soon as dawn broke, the noise started again. Tap, tap, tappity-tap. The resident Carrion Crow was at it again, banging on the door of our holiday cottage. We knew who the culprit was, even though we never caught the bird red-handed (should that be red-winged?!) By the time we reached the door, the crow had retreated onto the lawn to watch us intently. It threw back its head and cawed twice before flying into the nearby trees. All was quiet for a half-hour or so, and then it began again. Tap-tap, tap-tap-tap, and this was repeated regularly until dusk.

The outer door to the porch of our cottage was glass and already sported several bird decals, so clearly the owners knew about preventing bird strikes. The inner door was solid wood to keep the cold from the chilly porch at bay, but no matter how quickly or quietly we tried to open the inner door, we were never fast enough. By the time we poked our heads around it, the crow had flown onto the lawn and was looking as innocent as a Carrion Crow can. Circumstantial evidence of greasy feather marks over the glass and the rubber door surround hanging off in strips all pointed to one avian culprit.

How could we stop it? We didn't want the bird to hurt itself on the glass, and we weren't sure whether the next guests staying in the cottage would be as sympathetic to the bird. We tried hanging something on the inside of the door to break up the reflection but that didn't help. We left the front door open for a while, but that only worked while we were inside the cottage; it wasn't a permanent solution. And obviously, as it wasn't our own property, we couldn't very well hang shiny objects around the garden to deter the crow, though we did mention the problem to the owners in case they could take longer term action to help the bird before it hurt itself.

So why was our Carrion Crow so intent on banging against the door?

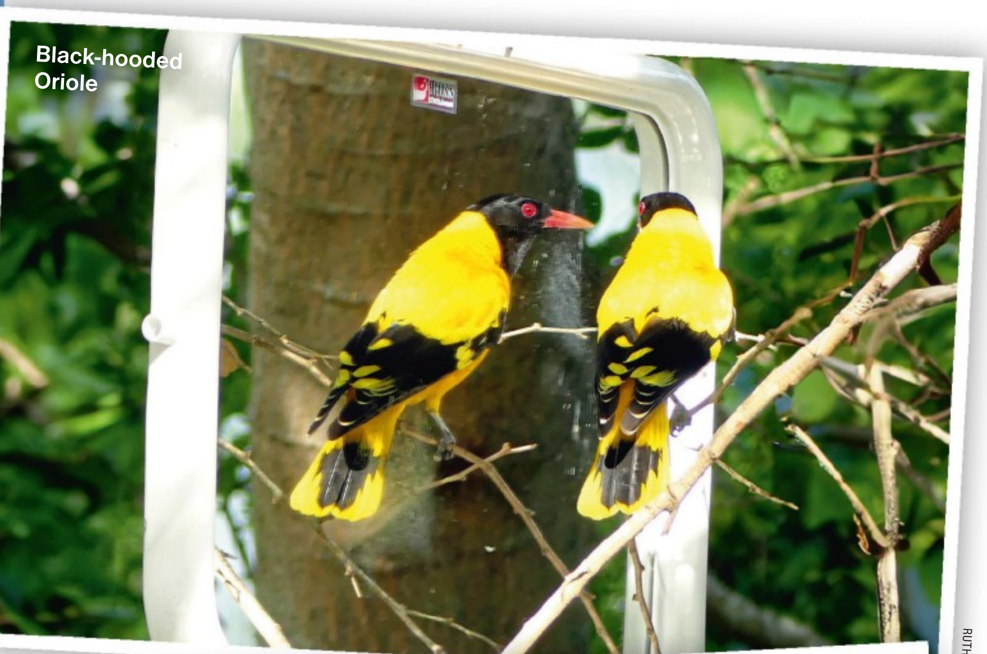
Sometimes birds will fly into a large window or glass door by accident because they can see light beyond and think there is a way through. They may also see the reflection of plants that are close to the door and believe they are flying to a safe perch. This obviously wasn't the case with our crow because there was no through light nor any planting close to the door.

Some birds, for example Blue Tits or House Sparrows, will fly up to a window to look for invertebrates caught up in a spider's web in the corner. Sometimes it is even the window putty itself that is the attraction. This may not strike us as an obvious source of food, but some putty contains linseed oil or fish oil which may have some nutritional value. However, these birds are usually dextrous enough to land briefly or even to hover as they snatch a tasty morsel without colliding with the window itself. This behaviour is more common in autumn or winter when food is becoming harder to find, and again this wasn't the reason for our head-banging crow.

However, there are many instances recorded of birds repeatedly flying up at windows because they see their own reflection in the

The Carrion Crow in question

RUTH MILLER



Black-hooded Oriole

RUTH MILLER

Blue Tits check for spider webs, and associated trapped invertebrates

MICK TAYLOR/ALAMY

glass. This happens particularly during the breeding season in spring, when birds are establishing their territories and want to chase off any rivals. They may catch a glimpse of themselves in the glass and, thinking it is another bird, fly straight at it in a bid to chase off the intruder that may pose a threat to their territory. Of course, the 'rival' never leaves and so the behaviour is repeated multiple times as the bird becomes obsessed with chasing off the imposter. This seemed to be the reason for our determined Carrion Crow repeatedly attacking our front door on a daily basis at any time of day between first light and dusk. It didn't appear to physically hurt itself, but who knows what mental frustration it may have been experiencing.

Problems can similarly occur with car mirrors in spring if birds can see their own reflection and mistake it for a rival who needs to be chased away. This is even more likely to happen if the car is regularly parked in the same spot every day, but on one memorable occasion on a visit to the Isle of Mull, our wing mirror was attacked by a particularly aggressive male Chaffinch who resented the arrival of the intruder we had unwittingly supplied. However, this was at a popular picnic spot that attracted birds looking for crumbs, so perhaps this Chaffinch attacked each and every car that parked there.

It is not just in Britain that this happens either. Birds such as Cardinals and American Robins in the United States are regularly recorded attacking windows and mirrors in a bid to chase off 'rivals'.

On one occasion several years ago when we were birding in Thailand, our attention was caught by a tapping sound coming from the garden of our lodge. We followed the sound until we discovered a Black-hooded Oriole tapping its bill against its own reflection in an ornamental mirror hanging up in the artistically designed garden. It seems that this bird behaviour is international.

Look online and you will find many suggestions for making windows less reflective in order to prevent bird attacks. These can range from the expensive, such as installing non-reflective glass or external shutters, to the simple, including applying bird decals or non-reflective cling film. But I most liked the suggestion of rubbing the glass with a bar of soap. Surely our holiday cottage owners wouldn't object. After all, if we didn't succeed in deterring the Carrion Crow, at least we had cleaned the glass door! BW

Ruth Miller is one half of The Biggest Twitch team, and along with *partner* Alan Davies, set the then world record for most bird species seen in a year – 4,341, in 2008, an experience they wrote about in their book, The Biggest Twitch. Indeed, Ruth is still the female world record-holder! As well as her work as a tour leader, she is the author of the Birds, Boots and Butties books, on walking, birding and tea-drinking in North Wales, and previously worked as the RSPB's head of trading. She lives in North Wales.

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DOMINIC COUZENS ON THE...

Little Egret

It's one of the ornithological success stories of recent years, writes **Dominic Couzens**, but is there more to it than that?

Young will not leave the nest until mid to late summer

OUR WILD LIFE PHOTOGRAPHY/ALAMY

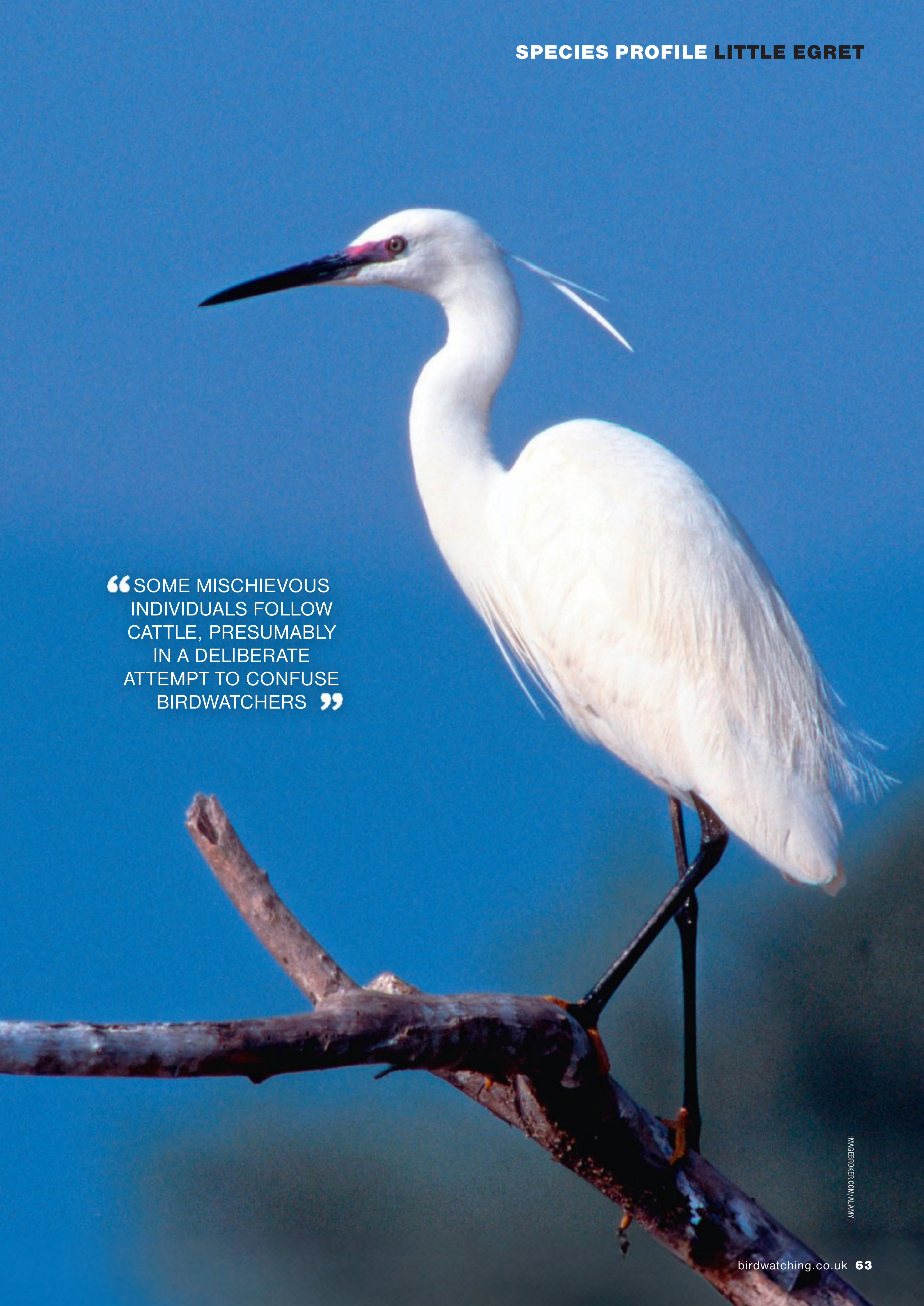
In a world where good environmental news is hard to come by, the story of the Little Egret's colonisation of Britain is a cheering one. It first bred in 1996 in Dorset, after sightings began to trickle in from the 1980s onwards, and up until 2022, the breeding population had increased by 2,347%. It passed 100 breeding pairs in 2001 and 1,000 pairs in 2015. This smart, elegant bird is still prospering, bringing a touch of the exotic to our country, and everybody is delighted.

The only slight problem with the general view of the Little Egret's unexpected settlement is that it may not actually be a novel event at all. There is some evidence that Little Egrets bred in England up until the Middle Ages, when shooting for the pot, widespread drainage of wetlands and the advent of the Little Ice Age (which started any time from 1300 and finished in the mid-19th Century) finished them off. The evidence comes mainly from lists of menus of Medieval banquets, which, for example, included "Egretys" at the coronation of King Henry VI in 1429 and "Egrittes" for the installation of the Archbishop of York in 1465. There was also a legal document for egret protection issued in 1564, and the London Poulterers produced price lists of various birds from the 13th Century until the 18th Century, and these included egrets. There has been a great deal of controversy about the accuracy of these lists, but the possibility remains that this bird is in fact a returning coloniser rather than a completely new immigrant. It doesn't make the current phenomenon any less delightful.

One thing that is for sure is that the Little Egret is a truly dynamic coloniser. It isn't just Britain. Wild birds have made their way across the Atlantic in the last 40 years or so. They are sometimes recorded in mainland North America, and they have already bred on Barbados (1994), Antigua (2005) and just recently in the Bahamas. This is a species that already occurs in Europe, Asia, Africa and Australia, so it is thriving worldwide.

It has a curious trick that enables this expansion, an unusual pattern of post-breeding dispersal, which is also seen in several other species of herons. After they leave the nest, in the mid to late summer onwards, the youngsters travel in any direction, for no specific distance. Many perish this way, but it is the perfect recipe for finding new places to settle. It is probably linked to the ephemeral nature of wetlands, which often dry out in the summer, and are always at a premium. The British colonisation began with juveniles arriving in summer and remaining north during our increasingly mild winters.

These birds bring a couple of puzzles with them, both to do with their colouration. Why, for example, are egrets white? There is a strong chance that it is to do with signalling, and that birds seeking good feeding areas simply look for their very obvious colleagues. A study showed also that juvenile Little Egrets feed more effectively in flocks, especially when there are adults present. However, some individuals, especially males, are highly territorial and don't benefit from being easy to see. Another problem is that, unlike a swan, egrets are good prey for larger predators and their plumage makes them very conspicuous. Closely related Bitterns have among the most effective camouflage of any birds, which could hardly offer a greater contrast. ▶



> “SOME MISCHIEVOUS INDIVIDUALS FOLLOW CATTLE, PRESUMABLY IN A DELIBERATE ATTEMPT TO CONFUSE BIRDWATCHERS”

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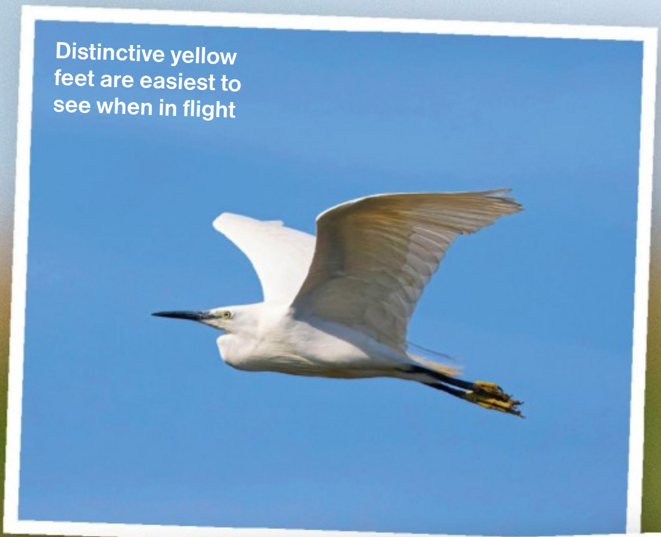
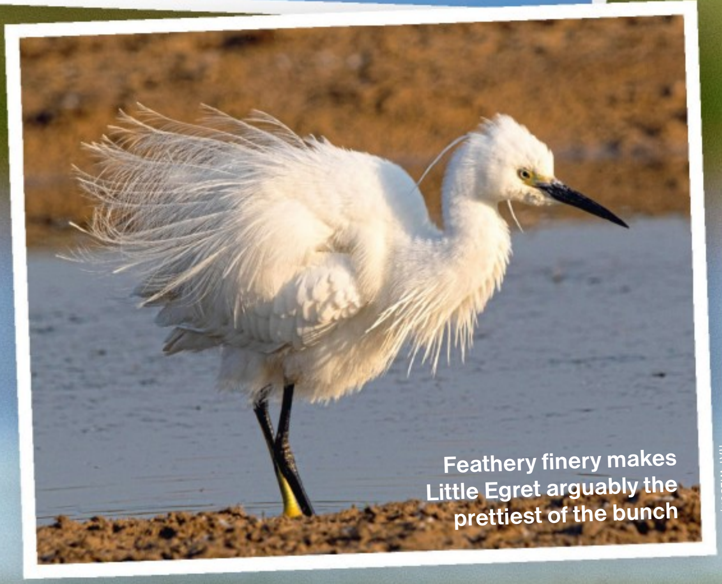


Distinctive yellow feet are easiest to see when in flight

BILL COSTER/ALAMY



Feathery finery makes Little Egret arguably the prettiest of the bunch

RAY WILSON/A LAMY

The other puzzle is the yellow feet, which develop when the young are still in the nest. It is thought that these are more conspicuous to prey than dark feet. Little Egrets feed in the shallows, and often simply walk along and flush prey into view. Fish and other animals are disturbed by the bright colours, or so it is thought, and this might have been why the quirk evolved.

However, there is strong evidence that the yellow is also an indication of fitness. Yellow in birds comes from carotenoid pigments sequestered from the tissues of prey animals. In the egrets' case these can be fish, crustaceans and insects, and the amount of pigment can be related to a birds' feeding ability and overall quality. The feet are used prominently in display, so perhaps they are used in mate selection.

Egrets use a wide variety of methods of catch prey and also eat a lot of different things; they are, though, exclusively carnivorous and most of their prey items are small (1-4cm long), in keeping with their body size in relation to herons and Great Egrets. They forage equally well in fresh or salt water and are especially common on estuaries in late summer and through the winter. Alongside what you might expect, they occasionally eat small birds, rodents and snakes.

SPECIES FACTFILE
LITTLE EGRET

Scientific name: *Egretta garzetta*

Length: 55-65cm

Wingspan: 88-106cm

UK numbers: 1,500+ breeding pairs, wintering population: 12,000 individuals

Habitat: Mainly wetlands, and always close to water – also wet grassland, especially around livestock.

Diet: Small fish, amphibians, crustaceans, molluscs, insects, spiders, worms and occasional small birds or mammals.

Herons generally, and egrets in particular, are marvellously inventive in the ways that they catch prey – up to 30 different methods are recorded. One of the more extraordinary, found mostly in the Striated Heron but also in Little Egrets, is using bait to attract fish into range. Little Egrets have been known to deposit pieces of bread to float in front of them and wait, quite literally, for a bite. They also occasionally hover over the water surface before striking from the air. Some mischievous individuals follow cattle, presumably in a deliberate attempt to confuse birdwatchers.

However, some of the best and most wholesome entertainment comes from watching Little Egrets feed in shallow water. While they often simply wait patiently in the same way as a heron, they often find this unsatisfactory, and will instead break into a run, especially if the prey is mobile but substantial. These birds are incapable of anything but elegance, and when they run, they often open their wings for balance, or just one wing. It is like ballet in the water.

Members of the heron family have some interesting adaptations for hunting. One of these is their vision, which is concentrated on

Little Egrets hunt in the shallows

BLICKWINKEL/ALAMY

Their balletic movement is a joy to behold

HEMIS/ALAMY STOCK

They're blessed with lightning reaction speed

TIERFOTOAGENTUR/ALAMY

the hemisphere in front of them. Most birds see well directly ahead, but vision recedes to the sides and below the bill. In herons and egrets, they can see all the way down to the ground, or indeed the water below them, so that anything in front is in sharp focus. Little Egrets, by the way, have been shown to compensate for refraction when hunting.

There are also several adaptations to the head and neck. The vertebral column is curved, as you can easily see in the wild, into a sharp S-shape, and the sixth cervical vertebra is greatly extended, with a special hinge. This enables herons to retract their head and neck very easily, but equally it means that they can also extend the neck at lightning speed, allowing for the famous strike, which is like a snap – many a late fish could attest to its effectiveness. The curious neck structure also means that the trachea and oesophagus cross over and run behind, rather than in front of the vertebral column. This extraordinary arrangement means that food takes the shortest distance possible to get to the stomach, but perhaps more importantly, it means that the vertebra protects these vital organs when the bird strikes forward, reducing the chance of injury.

These adaptations have allowed the heron family to spread all over the world, and often to be abundant wherever there is shallow water in which to feed. And several of the family, not least the Little Egret, could be described as world-beaters.

● Ref: Bourne, W.R.P. (2003). "Fred Stubbs, Egrets, Brewes and climatic change". British Birds. 96: 332–339. BW

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What superlatives can we use for the magical Isles of Scilly? Renowned World-wide as a migration hotspot, it is surely one of the best places in the Western Palearctic to see species from 'across the pond'.

Scilly is geographically blessed to receive rare vagrants from all points of the compass. Unlike many migration watchpoints, weather is less critical here for producing something of interest – good birds can turn up on any winds!

Each year, Scilly receives a plethora of American shorebirds, too, such as Pectoral and Buff-breasted Sandpipers and American Golden Plover. Scarcities such as Dotterel, Little Stint and Curlew Sandpiper often appear at this time, too, and we will be grilling any wader flocks for that White-rumped, Semipalmated or Baird's Sandpiper!

Passerines are high on the agenda, with Red-breasted Flycatcher, Yellow-browed Warbler, Little Bunting and Greenish Warbler all possibilities. Firecrest and Barred Warbler are expected at this time, and of course some top American land birds.

Large numbers of seabirds can still be present, and we will take a pelagic trip with the famous Sapphire, skippered by Joe Pender and led by World seabird expert Bob Flood. There will be chances to see Great Shearwater, European Storm-Petrel, Sooty Shearwater, and maybe skuas, terns, Sabine's Gull and Grey Phalarope.

Your tour leader will be Neil Glenn, who has a huge wealth of experience of guiding on Scilly. Expect to see about 120 species.

ITINERARY

DAY ONE

Meet at Land's End for morning flight to St Mary's. On arrival you will be met by Neil, and transfer to your accommodation. We will spend the day birding on St Mary's (but will consider a trip off-island if a rarity has been sighted).

DAYS TWO–SIX

We will plan a daily itinerary each evening for the following day, but may not know until breakfast exactly where we're heading, as any up to date information available may alter our best made plans! Most days we will venture to one of the off-islands, and will aim to visit St Agnes, St Martin's and Tresco at least once each. Great Pool on Tresco is a wader hotspot, and the sort of place a rare sandpiper from America could turn up. St Agnes has plenty of habitat for finding our own birds, and we may also visit the island of Bryher.

DAY SEVEN

We aim to spend the final morning birding on St Mary's, with an early afternoon flight to Land's End.

● Please note that travel plans may be disrupted at short notice due to adverse weather conditions and we recommend your travel insurance adequately covers any additional expenses involved. Flight times may vary depending on availability at the time of booking.

Turn the page for guide Neil Glenn's full article on the glorious birding riches of Scilly. BW

What's included

● Six nights en suite accommodation at Mincarlo Guest House on a B&B basis, evening meals, return flights from Land's End to Scilly and services of leader, plus pelagic boat trip.

NOT INCLUDED

● Travel insurance, drinks, any items of a purely personal nature, lunches (we can buy sandwiches from local shops), inter-island boat trips (expect about £10 per person per trip).

WHAT TO BRING

● Binoculars, scope (optional), camera, clothing for all weathers, walking boots, small rucksack, alarm clock, seasickness pills and field guide.

TOUR DESCRIPTION

● A lot of walking is required to get the most from your holiday. The terrain is mostly easy with much of the walking on roads, but reasonable level of physical fitness is required. Expect some potentially long days in the field and several inter-island boat trips. You will need to be able to walk 6-7 miles per day.

GROUP SIZE

● Maximum of nine participants.

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The fortunate Isles

Anything is possible in what remains the UK's most iconic location for finding rare birds, writes **Neil Glenn**

Wryneck

KIT DAY/ALAMY

Despite it being 21 October, my bald pate is in danger of burning. I am in a field on the Isles of Scilly, standing on a path in a very thick patch of brambles, where a Wryneck had been 'showing extremely well' just a few moments before I arrived. By the time my group and I are in place, however, the cryptically plumaged woodpecker has gone to ground. We wait…

With a bird such as this, it is just a matter of how patient you want to be. This field – 'The Standing Stones Field' – is a hotspot for Wryneck and other migrant species, such as Red-backed Shrike, Barred Warbler, Whinchat etc. I have already shown another group two Wrynecks together in this very same area two weeks before. We wait…

After 75 minutes, we admit defeat; hunger drives us to the nearest café. While enjoying a cooling drink, news filters through that the Wryneck is, once again 'showing extremely well'. And now, over to the news desk for the latest score – Wryneck 1 Birders 0. There will definitely be a rematch.

In the afternoon, we head for Deep Point, a scenic clifftop lookout. It is still shirt-sleeve weather, and Cornwall is 'showing well' through the heat haze. There is no sign of the Snow Bunting that had been precisely that just a couple of minutes later. It was going to be one of those days!

Suddenly, one of my group excitedly pointed and calmly stated: "WRYNECK!". Sure enough, hopping about on the granite rocks was a gorgeous Wryneck, cricking its neck to survey its surroundings. We managed to get a few other birdwatchers onto it before it dropped out of view. A life bird for the beaming finder, celebrated with a few pints in the bar in the evening. We never did see the Snow Bunting or the other 'showy' Wryneck. Wryneck 1 Birders 1…

The above tale is typical of a visit to Scilly. The saying 'you win some, you lose some' sums up your likely experience, but there's usually something waiting to be found just around the corner.

As you all probably know, the Isles of Scilly lie about 28 miles south-west of Cornwall. Visitors reach Scilly by helicopter, small plane

South Polar Skua

RICHARD STONER

Red-backed Shrike

HUGH HARROP/ALAMY

or bumpy ferry. Air travel is by far the quickest way, but the boat gives you the chance of seeing some very sought-after seabirds – Great, Sooty, Manx and Cory's Shearwaters are regular, along with Gannets, Fulmars, Storm Petrels and any number of rarities over the years. Common Dolphins are virtually guaranteed, and Bluefin Tuna sightings are on the increase.

The archipelago has a long track record of attracting scarce and rare migrant birds from around the globe in spring and autumn, but particularly autumn. Everything and anything is possible. In fact, birds from southern Europe, Siberia and North America have been seen on one island at the same time, sometimes in the same small field!

Many rocky islands make up the Isles of Scilly. St Mary's is the main hub of the archipelago, and is where the bulk of birdwatchers choose to stay. Other inhabited islands include Tresco, Bryher, St Martin's and St Agnes. A typical birdwatching tour to Scilly will include a visit to at least one of these outposts: remember, anything can turn up, anywhere, at any time!

Each 'off island' is reached by an inter-island boat service, efficiently run by the Boatman's Association. When a rare bird turns up on one of these other islands, depending on the height of the tide, these expert sailors will get you where you want to be, when you want to be there. The boatmen have served birdwatchers extremely well for decades and many of us owe several 'lifers' on our lists to them!

In return, birdwatchers extend the tourist season in Scilly for about a month, which is heartily welcomed by (most) businesses.

Wandering around the Isles of Scilly is a delight, whether the bushes and pools are bursting with bird activity or not. The whole archipelago is designated as an Area of Outstanding National Beauty and photos of some of the deserted beaches are cheekily used in holiday brochures advertising holidays to the Caribbean! Of course, autumn storms can make birdwatching very hard work – and can make getting on and off the islands unpredictable – but it is these storms that will hopefully bring in some rare waifs and strays. When news breaks of a rare bird in Scilly, most visiting birders will try to see it (or them). However,

Yellow-browed Warbler

a handful choose to head the opposite way and try to find their own birds. There's always an alternative option in Scilly.

On quiet days, when birdwatchers meet, it is inevitable that the subject of the weather crops up. Much speculation occurs about what birds will be brought in by the storm heading quickly across The Atlantic. Quite often, nothing comes from it. More often than not, a rare bird turns up in unfavourable conditions and birders wonder just how the stray has been brought to our shores. The only thing predictable about birdwatching is its unpredictability!

Each individual island has its own character. Tresco is home to the largest stretch of freshwater on the islands: Tresco Great Pool. It attracts the greatest number of wildfowl to the islands and most birders visit at least once during their stay. St Martin's is the least visited island, which is why it is much loved by people wishing to luxuriate in solitude and try to find their own birds. Bryher is a delightful place: lots of bays and sheltered nooks and crannies topped with an area of (nationally rare) maritime heath, favoured by pipits and occasional trips of passage Dotterels and Buff-breasted Sandpipers. St Agnes is a favourite of many birdwatchers; not only does it have a long track record of attracting mega-rarities and sought-after scarcities, it also has a farm that produces the best ice cream in the world (in my humble opinion).

Common Dolphin

FLPA/ALAMY

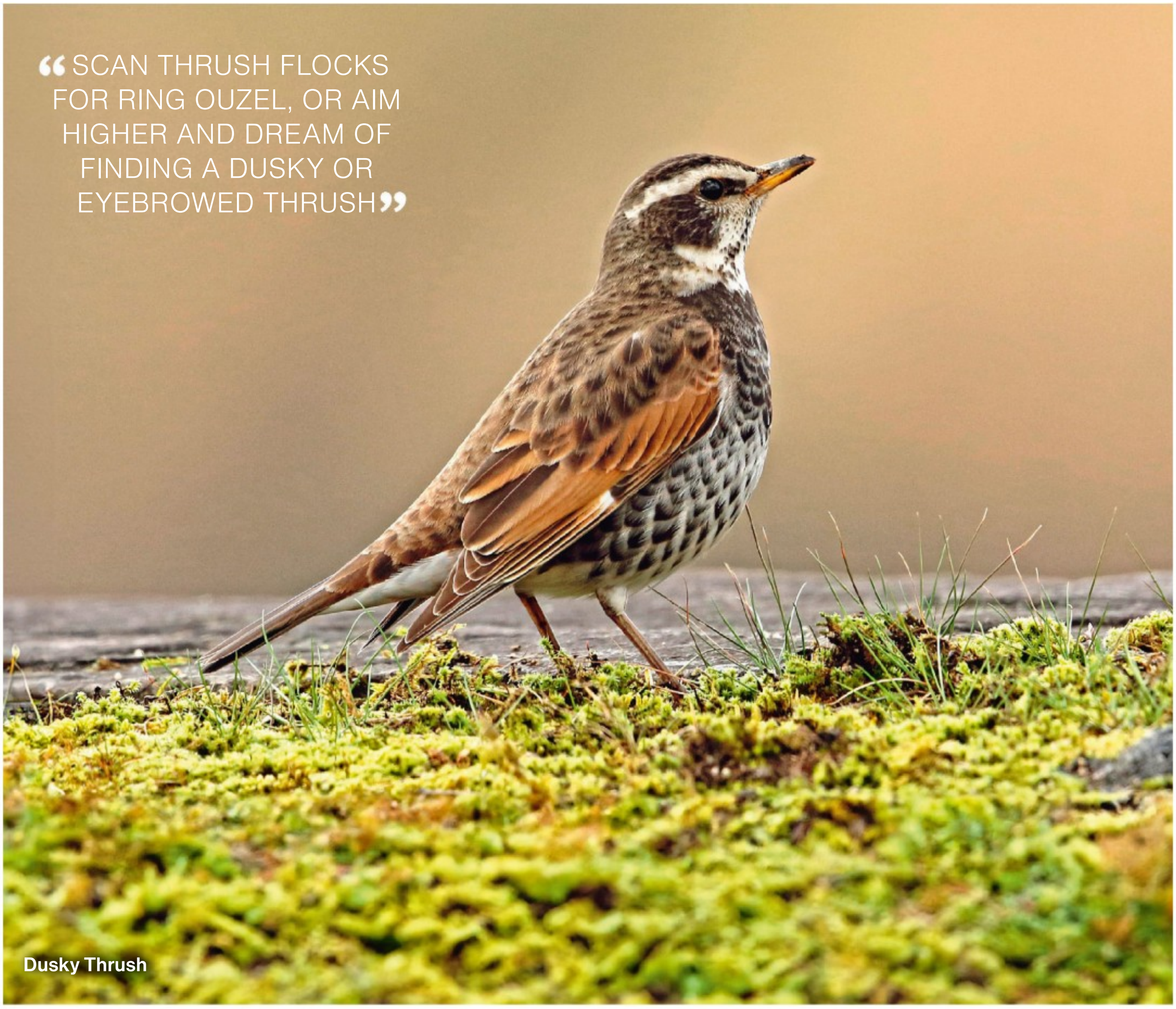
A trip to the Fortunate Isles usually involves a mixture of 'chasing' birds that have been found by others, and carefully strolling along the leafy lanes and trails trying to find your own birds. People visiting for the first time may get the impression that finding rare and scarce birds is easy. Let me tell you that it certainly is not!

While it is relatively straightforward finding your own Yellow-browed Warbler – especially if you are familiar with the strident two-note call – getting a good view of the incredibly active little gem is another matter entirely. Yes, the regular finders of rarities seem to have the knack of being in the right place at the right time, but there is much more to the 'art' than that. You have to be prepared to study every bird and flock, to have that mental capacity to keep going, keep looking even if you have had a very quiet day. It is extremely easy to pass your 17th flock of House Sparrows without studying it and miss that lurking first-winter Common Rosefinch or Bobolink.

If all of this scanning and walking has tired you out, then maybe a trip aboard The Sapphire is what your weary bones require? After all, you are not allowed to bring your car to the islands, so most of your exploration will be on foot. There are taxis, and you can also hire cycles and golf carts should the exertions become too much, but most of the time your feet will take the strain.

When conditions aren't too rough and the wind is in the right direction, word will circulate – the grapevine is very efficient in Scilly – that Joe Pender will be taking his trusty boat out to look for seabirds.

In recent years, Great and Cory's (and even



“SCAN THRUSH FLOCKS FOR RING OUZEL, OR AIM HIGHER AND DREAM OF FINDING A DUSKY OR EYEBROWED THRUSH”

Dusky Thrush

RALPH MARTIN, AGAMI PHOTO AGENCY/ALAMY

FLPA/ALAMY STOCK

Scopoli’s) Shearwaters have been lingering in Scilly waters far longer than previously. To see ‘The Big Shears’ 10 or more years ago, you would have had to travel to Scilly in July and August, but not now. Changing sea temperatures – and shoals of Anchovy – mean you can reliably see near mythical beasts such as Great and Cory’s Shearwaters through until the end of October and beyond. Recent Octobers have also produced South Polar Skua, Fea’s-type Petrel, Red-footed Booby and more.

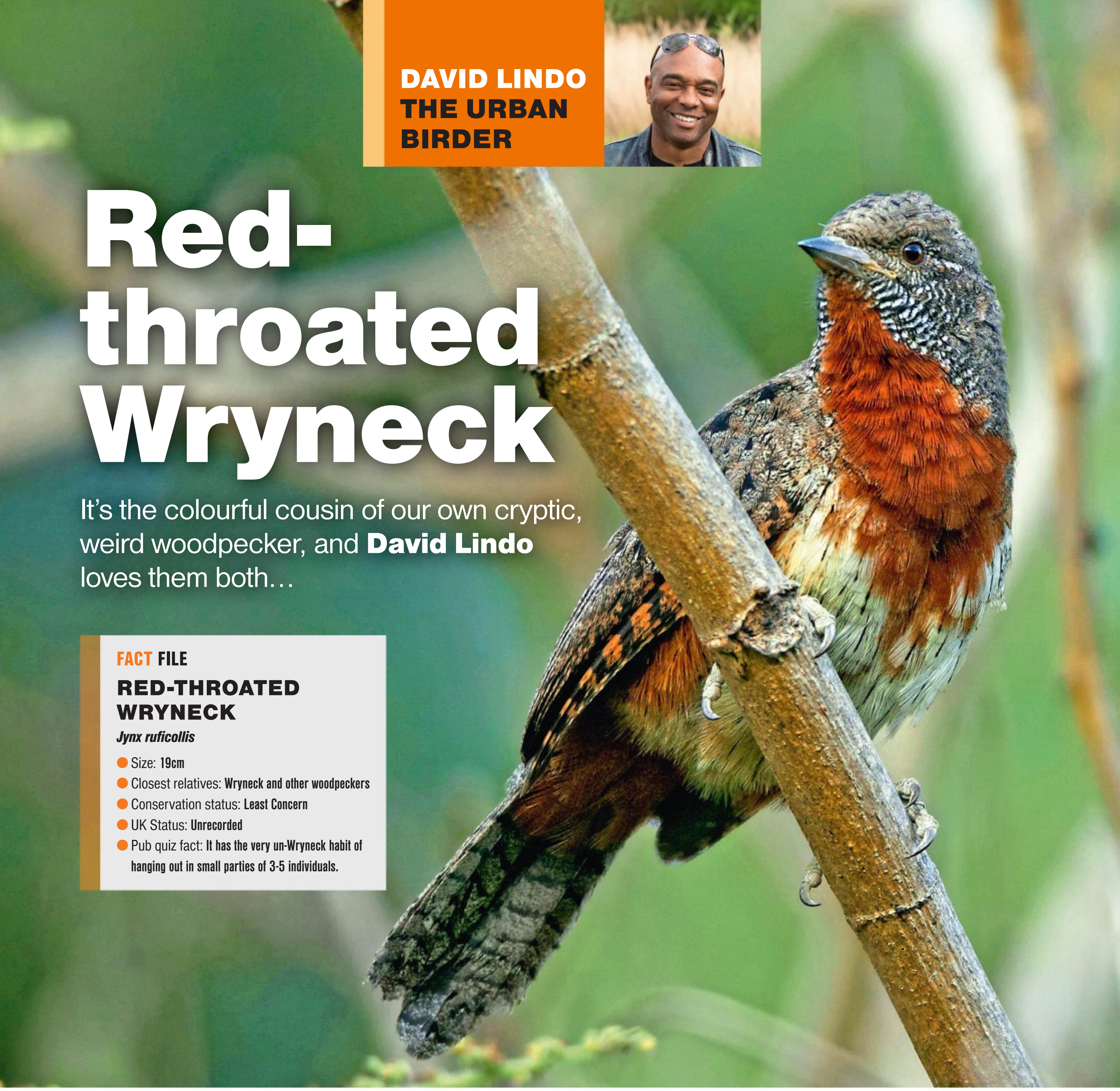
My last pelagic (on 23 October 2024) produced one of the most awesome British birding experiences I’ve ever had. After a few hours of decent birding (including Purple Sandpipers and Manx and Sooty Shearwaters), we came across a large flock of resting seabirds. For the next 90 minutes, our small boat was surrounded by more than 1,000 Cory’s Shearwaters and a few hundred Great Shearwaters. Photos later revealed there had also been at least four Scopoli’s Shearwaters hiding in plain sight among the throng. A Humpback Whale and a Balearic Shearwater made for a very special day indeed (capped by us jumping into a taxi to go and see an obliging Hoopoe on St Mary’s!). My advice is to stock up on seasickness tablets and get out there into the deep blue unknown!

Discoveries of extreme rarities (such as those featured in the panel, right) are of course rare, but in Scilly one really does feel that anything is possible. However, on any given day in times of migration, it is easy to find your own Wheatears – probably the last you will see until next spring – or Redwings and Fieldfares – probably the first of the winter you’ll see. These regular passage migrants may be the arrivals that bring in something rarer. Scan those thrush flocks for Ring Ouzels, or aim ‘higher’ and dream of finding a Dusky or Eyebrowed Thrush.

Whatever birds you see in Scilly, I can almost guarantee that you will fall in love with the islands. I always tell my group members to be prepared to visit once and then have to return again and again. I hope, like they do me, The Isles of Scilly grab you by the heartstrings and draw you back time after time after time… BW

Twitchers’ tales

- **On St Agnes in the autumn of 1999, after marvelling at a Siberian Thrush, birders were drooling over a White’s Thrush when Britain’s first ever Short-toed Eagle flew over their heads!**
- **After being stranded on the islands by a storm in 2004, a visiting birdwatcher decided to stretch his legs at the northern end of St Mary’s, where he stumbled across Britain’s fourth ever Ovenbird!**
- **While on a boat bobbing up and down on the sea around the Bishop Rock Lighthouse, a birder admiring Britain’s second ever Red-footed Booby roosting at the top of the structure decided to give his neck a rest. He looked down to find a Brown Booby perched with Shags at the foot of the lighthouse!**



Red-throated Wryneck

It's the colourful cousin of our own cryptic, weird woodpecker, and **David Lindo** loves them both…

FACT FILE

RED-THROATED WRYNECK

Jynx ruficollis

- Size: **19cm**
- Closest relatives: **Wryneck and other woodpeckers**
- Conservation status: **Least Concern**
- UK Status: **Unrecorded**
- Pub quiz fact: **It has the very un-Wryneck habit of hanging out in small parties of 3-5 individuals.**

Wrynecks are former breeders that are now much sought-after migrants to the UK. They are the weird little cousins of the woodpeckers. Despite their cryptic plumage pattern, warbler-like shape and their general avoidance for hardcore headbanging on tree limbs, we often forget that they are indeed woodpeckers that we all know so well.

Their kinship with woodpeckers is evidenced by their large heads, and long tongues that are wrapped around their skull whose tips are barbed and sticky and used for snaring insects. Finally, they share the other classic woodpecker trait: zygodactyl feet. To the uninitiated, having zygodactyl feet means that you would have two toes pointing forward and two backwards. However, how many of you actually knew that there are two species of wryneck in the world?

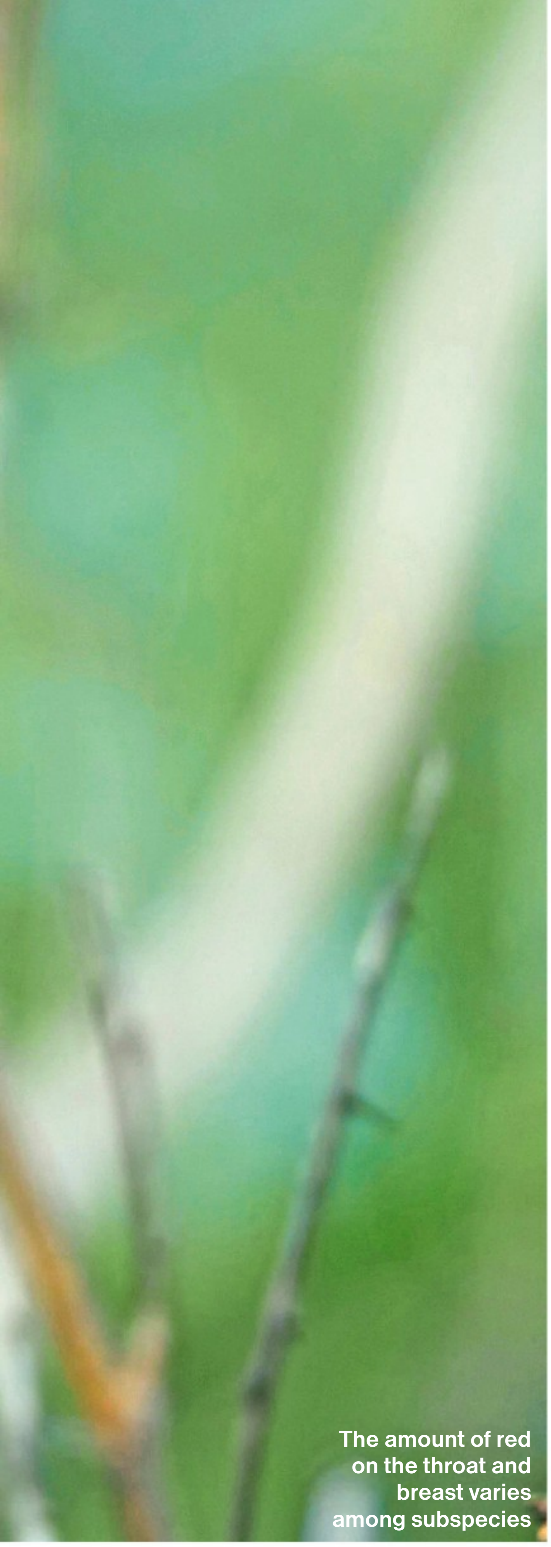
We all know the (Eurasian) Wryneck, but let me introduce to you the Red-throated Wryneck, a patchily distributed resident of sub-Saharan Africa. But before you start worrying about the plight of this species due to its seemingly fragmented distribution, let me assure you that within this quite extensive range their population is large and apparently increasing.

In South Africa, the increase in numbers has been put down to the planting of non-native trees onto formally treeless grasslands, thus creating new habitat. That being said, their numbers are generally hard to assess, due to pairs being widely scattered.

Within the woodpecker world, the two species form the subfamily Jynginae and both belong to the same genus, *Jynx*. The duo forms a superspecies that probably separated early in their evolution from the equally weird piculets; tiny woodpecker-like birds that look like big-beaked speckly tits – a description not to be repeated outside of birding circles!

Both wrynecks will famously twist their necks in a snake-like manner, making hissing noises when threatened. The Red-throated Wryneck, aka African, Rufous-necked or Red-breasted Wryneck, roughly shares the same cryptic plumage of its European counterpart, in that its mantle and tail is vermiculated grey, brown and black, too. But it differs by having a very striking Robin-like red throat and upper breast.

It was this feature that made me really long



The amount of red on the throat and breast varies among subspecies

IMAGEBROKER.COM/ALAMY

Like our own Wryneck, it is a woodpecker, although it pecks very little wood

IMAGEBROKER.COM/ALAMY

Red-throated Wrynecks sometimes appear in small groups

ALF JACOB NILSEN/ALAMY

to see one. I mean, a Wryneck with a red throat – what's not to get excited about? I had my first opportunity see this distinctive bird during a visit to Ethiopia in 2009. I failed to find one, despite others in my group later gloating that they had seen one when I was looking the other way. The subspecies there has the most extensive red frontage, of the three recognised subspecies, running down onto its upper belly, plus with reddish undertail and lower stomach. I had to wait until last year, when I lucked onto one while leading a tour group urban birding in Nairobi, Kenya. I noted at the time that this wryneck species was subtly larger than our bird and seemed a little more elongated, thus thrush-like in its posture. The subspecies in this region of Africa also has a bit of black-and-white barring on its throat.

Red-throated Wrynecks are largely resident, but are prone to be dispersive and they may even be nomadic. They often colonise an area for a period, only to suddenly vanish and then to reappear in the same area several years later. Eurasian Wrynecks, incidentally the most migratory woodpecker on the planet, occasionally winter within the range of their larger cousin. You would hope that they would entice one of their red-throated cousins to make the journey back to Europe with them.

But alas, that has never happened, nor is it likely to, as this African bird has never strayed outside of the continent. Indeed, the nearest it has got to the UK was Sudan. So, I am afraid that if you want to see a resplendent Red-throated Wryneck, you will have to grab your shorts and malaria tablets and head out to Africa. BW

David's new book for younger readers, Fly, is out now. It's a fully illustrated collection of more than 150 birds from around the world and is available from all good retailers.

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Snow Bunting

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Matt Merritt, Birdwatching Magazine

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Mike Alibone

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With Mountain Accessory Pack.

	RRP	NOW
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Green | Anthracite

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High optical performance

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10x32	£1860	**£1599**
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10x42	£2150	**£1827**

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Rugged & compact!

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PASSPORT 10YR WARRANTY PLUS 2YR ACCIDENTAL DAMAGE

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50mm, 65mm & 80mm SPOTTING SCOPES

Nitrogen Purged - Waterproof - Shockproof

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The new Vortex Crossfire HD spotting scopes offer users a choice of 3 affordable models each featuring a 3x zoom and an HD optical system with select glass elements to aid resolution, light transmission, colour fidelity and cut chromatic abberation.

The helical (barrel) focus allows for quick and easy focussing while the fully multi-coated lenses have anti-reflective coatings on all air-to glass surfaces for increased light transmission bringing greater clarity and low-light performance.

80mm ▲
65mm ▸
50mm ▸

80mm Straight ▲
65mm Angled ▲
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• *Includes Neoprene Stay on Case*

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10x50	£229	**£205**
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DIAMONDBACK HD

Stunning views, great in low-light

NEW HD MODELS

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10x28	£179	**£159**
8x32	£239	**£215**
10x32	£249	**£229**
8x42	£259	**£235**
10x42	£269	**£245**
10x50	£289	**£259**
12x50	£309	**£279**
15x56 NEW	£409	**£369**

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HD extra-low dispersion glass. Award winning binoculars.

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Small, light, bright, strong. Great optical performance

Superb

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8x42	£1699	**£1329**
10x42	£1729	**£1359**
10x50	£1759	**£1389**
12x50	£1799	**£1419**
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Light and tough.

8x30	**£129**
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10x42	**£159**

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Compact and tough.

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10x42	**£229**

Monarch M5
Compact and tough.

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10x42	**£319**
12x42	**£339**

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Compact and tough.

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10x30	**£359**
8x42	**£409**
10x42	**£429**

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Outstanding clarity & wide field of view. For birdwatching or tracking wild animals.

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10x30	£949	**£799**
8x42	£999	**£849**
10x42	£1049	**£879**

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Delivering a spectacular field of view. Lenses made with Nikon ED glass.

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8x42		**SOLD OUT**
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LYNX 2.0 - 19mm
Thermal Imaging Monocular
Exceptional Value for money: Priced competitively for both day and night bird-watching enthusiasts, it's perfect for capturing and sharing bird-watching moments with ease.
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The nature specialist, HIKMICRO's go-to thermal monocular for bird watching since its release. Exceptional Thermal Clarity and ultra- wide field of view, detects birds in dense foliage or twilight conditions. Offers enhanced identification performance.
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Thermal Imaging Bionoculars
Thermal Binoculars are a game-changer for bird-watching enthusiasts, making it easier than ever to locate birds in dense foliage or low-light conditions. Combined with a 4K optical camera for seamless and superior day and night bird-watching.
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AXION XQ30 PRO
Thermal Imaging Monocular
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AXION COMPACT XG30
Thermal Imaging Monocular
Best for Medium-Range Bird-watching: with a detection range of 1,300m. For observing birds in forests, parks, wetlands, or other environments where distances are less extreme.
XG30 - 640x480 **£1399.95**

AXION COMPACT XG35
Thermal Imaging Monocular
Best for Long-Range Birdwatching: with a detection range of 1,750m. For observing birds in large open areas like fields, coasts, or mountains, where birds are often farther away.
XG35 - 640x480 **£1579.95**

TELOS XP50
Thermal Imaging Monocular
Perfect for long-range bird-watching where image detail is critical, especially when observing large raptors or other birds of prey from a distance.
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Outstanding performance. New amazing price

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Secacam 7	12MP	60 Black	25m	440g	£249	**£199.99**

Accessories: Padlock - **£12.99** • 4G Antenna - **£14.99** • Tree Band - **£10.99** • Battery Tray - **£12.99**

NEW

SECACAM 3
TRAIL CAMERA
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Victory Pocket | Victory SF 32 | SFL 30 | SFL 40 | Conquest 32 HDX | Conquest 42 HDX | Terra Pocket 25, 32 ED & 42 ED

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Get £50 Cashback
Get £50 Cashback
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Get £50 Cashback
Get £50 Cashback

Model	Colours	RRP	Price
Terra ED Pocket 8x25	Black/Grey or Black	RRP £325	**£309**
Terra ED Pocket 10x25	Black/Grey or Black	RRP £345	**£329**
Terra ED 8x32	Black, Black/Grey or Green/Black	RRP £430	**£409**
Terra ED 10x32	Black, Black/Grey or Green/Black	RRP £480	**£449**
Terra ED 8x42	Black, Black/Grey or Green/Black	RRP £480	**£449**
Terra ED 10x42	Black, Black/Grey or Green/Black	RRP £530	**£490**

CONQUEST HD PROMOTIONS

Perfect all-rounder - outstanding performance for ambitious nature observation.

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SAVE £225
SAVE £269
SAVE £275
SAVE £350
SAVE £363

Model	Colour	WAS	NOW
Conquest HD 8x32	Black	WAS £850	**NOW £637**
Conquest HD 10x32	Black	WAS £900	**NOW £675**
Conquest HD 8x42	Black	WAS £1075	**NOW £806**
Conquest HD 10x42	Black	WAS £1100	**NOW £825**
Conquest HD 8x56	Black	WAS £1400	**NOW £1050**
Conquest HD 10x56	Black	WAS £1450	**NOW £1087**

CONQUEST HDX NEW

BINOCULARS

90% Light transmission | Extremely robust | Up to 15x magnification | Seven models available

Razor-sharp view even at long distances

Combining superior optical performance, robustness and ergonomics at an extremely attractive price, the Conquest HDX is the ideal premuin all-round binoculars.

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Conquest HDX 8x42	715g	**£1075**
Conquest HDX 10x42	715g	**£1100**
Conquest HDX 8x56	1235g	**£1400**
Conquest HDX 10x56	1250g	**£1450**
Conquest HDX 15x56	1265g	**£1500**

VICTORY SFL

BINOCULARS

90% Light transmission | Ultralight & compact Design | Perfect Ergonomics | Four models available

Lightweight model among high-performance binoculars.

New Ultra-High-Definition (UHD) concept ensures true-to-life color reproduction and the highest level of detail.

Victory SFL 8x30	460g	**£1299**
Victory SFL 10x30	460g	**£1349**
Victory SFL 8x40	640g	**£1549**
Victory SFL 10x40	640g	**£1599**

VICTORY SF

BINOCULARS

Rediscover the world of birdwatching with the ZEISS Victory® SF.

Experience every spectacle nature has to offer with brilliant optics and an unparalleled wide-angle field of view. Light weight with a unique ergonomic design and dynamic fast-focus feature allows for hours of relaxing birding without fatigue.

		NOW
Victory SF 8x32	£2250	**£2099**
Victory SF 10x32	£2300	**£2139**
Victory SF 8x42	£2500	**£2359**
Victory SF 10x42	£2550	**£2399**

VICTORY HARPIA

SPOTTING SCOPE

88% Light transmission | ComfortVision concept | Duel speed | Two models availble

High performance spotting scope

Elaborate lens system - FL glass and other custom glass ensure an absolutely sharp and colour fidelity image even at maximum magnification.

85 ▸
95 ▾
ZEISS T* Coating

	RRP	NOW
Victory Harpia 85 - 22x65 - Body Only	£3300	**£2999**
Victory Harpia 95 - 32x70 - Body Only	£3700	**£3299**
Eyepiece to fit 22x65 (85) or 23x70 (95)	£705	**£649**

Eyepiece

CONQUEST GAVIA 85

SPOTTING SCOPE

Short close-focus | 85mm objective lens diameter | 60x magnification

Explorers companion

The ZEISS T* coating gives brilliant, high-contrast images which makes this ideal in adverse light conditions and in the twilight. This scope provides birdwatchers and nature observers with a high-performance spotting scope that is simply great value.

ZEISS T* Coating

Conquest Gavia 85 30-60x....RRP £1850 **NOW £1749**

THERMAL IMAGING PROMOTIONS

Enhance your nature experience - for more discoveries at night and during the day.

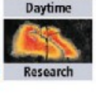
SAVE £576
SAVE £651
SAVE £1750
SAVE £1750

Compact & lightweight | High resolution LCOS Display
Precise zoom | Two models available

DTI 1/19	DTI 1/25
WAS £1475	WAS £1650
NOW £899	**NOW £999**

ZSIP Pro image processing | Removable battery
High resolution AMOLED Display | Two models availble

DTI 6/20	DTI 6/40
WAS £4000	WAS £4250
NOW £2250	**NOW £2500**



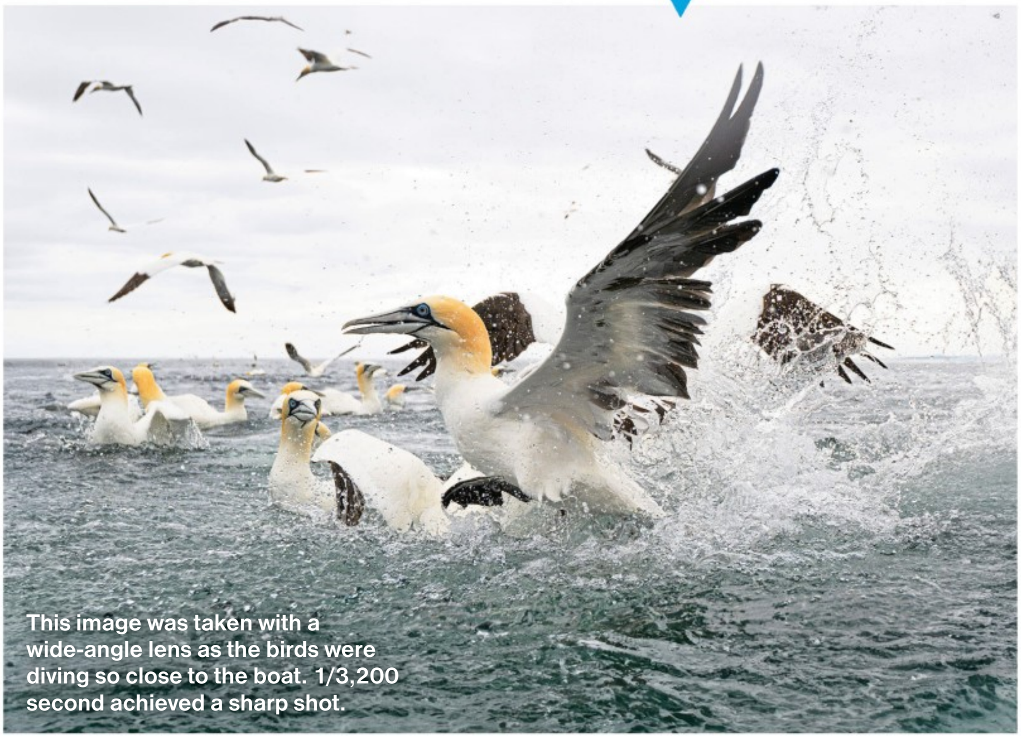
E+OE Prices subject to change. Goods subject to availability

It’s all about behaviour

The breeding season provides great opportunities for action shots, writes **Rob Read**

IMAGE SPEC

Camera: **Nikon Z9**
Focal length: **35mm**
Exposure: **1/3,200 sec; ISO 1,000**



This image was taken with a wide-angle lens as the birds were diving so close to the boat. 1/3,200 second achieved a sharp shot.

Spring has most definitely arrived. The last few days have seen the warmest temperatures of the year, kickstarting all of nature’s reproductive cycles as the promise of longer days and warmer temperatures wakes everything from its winter slumber and calls it to action. As I write, not only do I have a warm breeze blowing in through my study window, but the birdsong is also noticeably louder and more urgent than in recent weeks. How I love the seasons of transition.

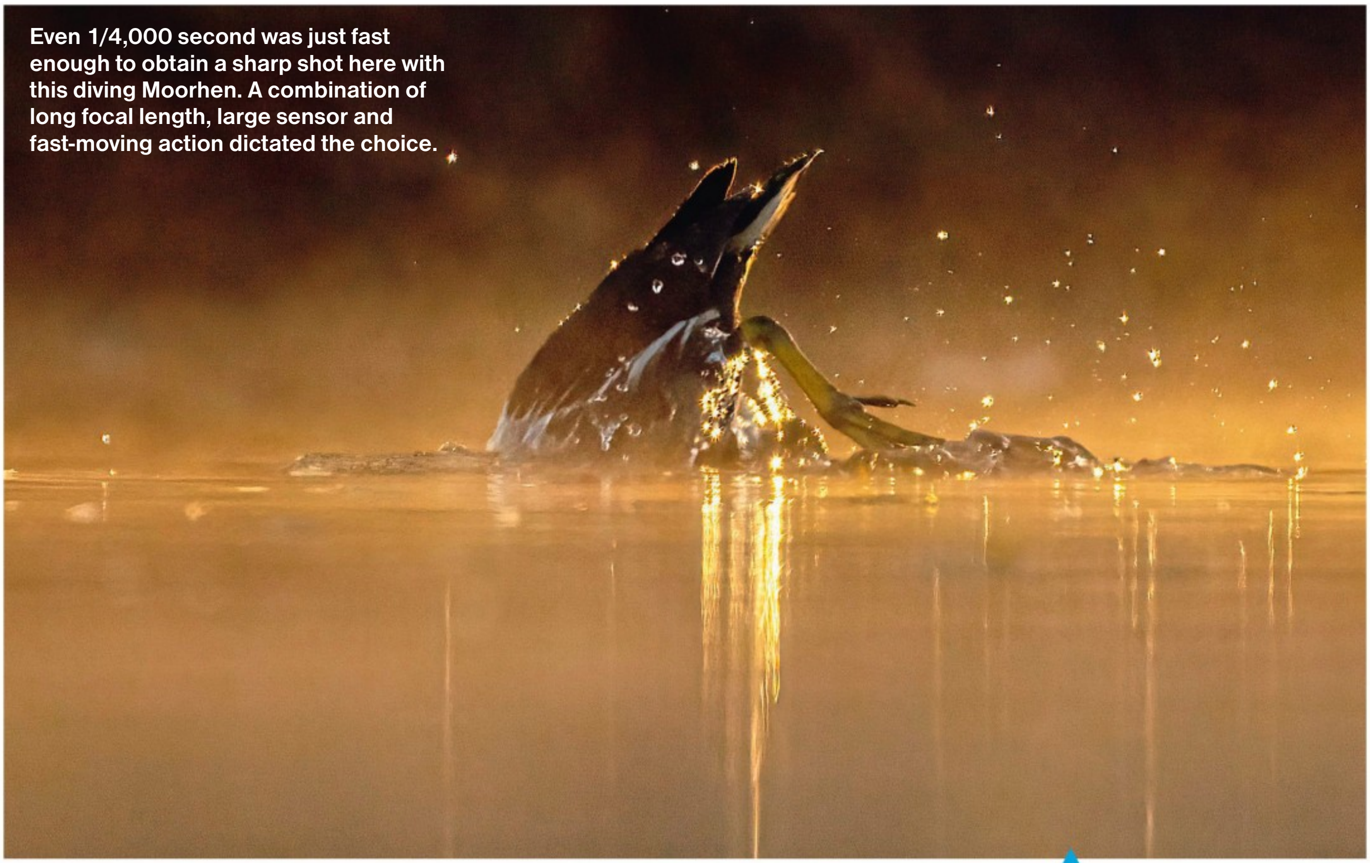
The arrival of spring heralds a change in bird activity, and now is the perfect time of year to capture the amazing array of behaviour that we begin to witness as the daylight hours stretch out. Personally, I find photos that depict behaviour far more interesting than simple portrait images. Not only can they capture those unique and often explosive moments of time that are all too often over in a flash, but they can also deliver an interesting and informative narrative to the viewer. In this article, I’ll look at a few examples from my own archive and attempt to provide some useful hints and tips to set you on your own path to document some of the varying behaviours you will witness over the coming months.

One of the most critical elements when capturing behaviour is fieldcraft. Knowledge of your subject and its habits will give you a huge advantage over a photographer who knows little or nothing about the animals in front of them. As bird lovers, we have all spent countless hours simply observing birds, giving us valuable experience we can leverage when it comes to taking photos. Anticipating what is likely to come next is vital – being prepared for the shot and understanding the likely next move means that we stand a much better chance of success. Of course, with cameras now capable of upwards of 20 frames per second and sophisticated precapture features taking images before you have even fired the shutter, action sequences are easier than they have ever been to capture successfully. However, nothing beats anticipation as the key to quick reaction; just ask any sports professional.

When it comes to camera settings for action shots, perhaps the most important one within the exposure triangle (aperture, shutter speed and ISO) is shutter speed. With the advancement in technology cramming an ever-increasing number of pixels into our sensors and the improving performance of our optics, subject movement is becoming magnified like never before, necessitating bold shutter speed choices if a crisp shot is the aim. True, camera and lens stabilisation systems have helped enormously to mitigate camera shake, but they are not going to help with the fast movements of a subject. And remember, the closer you are to your subject, the more the movement is exaggerated, and the faster the shutter speed will need to be.

When freezing the action and capturing a shot with sharpness across the entire frame is the intention, how do we judge what shutter speed will be required? That’s a tricky question to answer as there are so many variables at play. How quickly is your subject moving? How close are you to it? What is the focal length of the lens? How large is the sensor? All of these factors will have a bearing on the settings you choose, and there is no substitute for experience. Failures provide useful lessons, especially when it comes to shutter speed choice – not enough speed will be instantly obvious when you review your results from a shoot and, in my experience, is the most common cause of soft images.

I will generally try to use as fast a speed as I can reasonably achieve given the light levels available. I have absolutely no issue with opening the aperture up as far as it will go and bumping up the ISO to increase my options if I need to – better a slightly noisy image than one that displays softness from motion blur. Gone are the days when ISOs over 400 were a thing to be avoided; often I am using upwards of 1,000 ISO and would have no hesitation to go beyond 5,000 if needed. A good lower benchmark for action shutter speed is around 1/2,000 second (always look for more if you can sensibly



Even 1/4,000 second was just fast enough to obtain a sharp shot here with this diving Moorhen. A combination of long focal length, large sensor and fast-moving action dictated the choice.

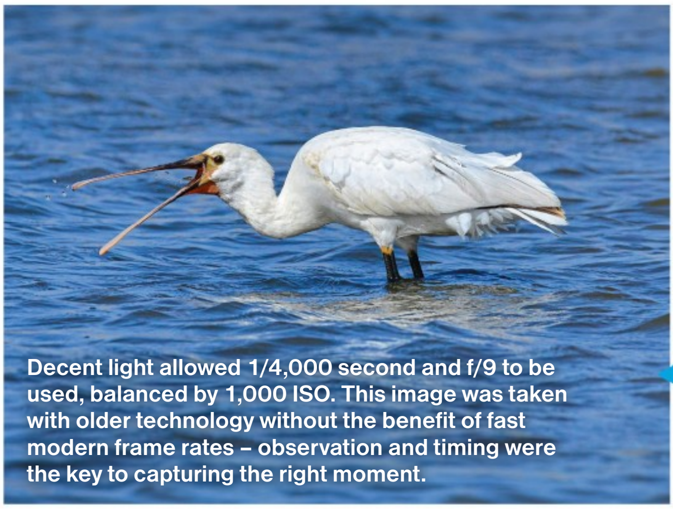
IMAGE SPEC

Camera: **Nikon D800E**
Focal length: **500mm**
Exposure: **1,400 sec; ISO 2,000**

get it), but if you are photographing something extremely fast-moving, or you want to freeze those flying water droplets or wingbeats, then you may need something even quicker. One of the joys of modern mirrorless cameras is that many no longer have a physical shutter and this makes even faster shutter speeds available to us than were possible with DSLRs, increasing our options. A good rule of thumb is to double the speed you think you need and adjust the aperture and ISO to compensate. And remember, even birds that appear not to be moving all that quickly can deceive you. Small movements of heads, wings, and feet can lead to blur and softness in areas of the image, so keep those speeds up even if you don't think you'll need them.

Autofocus is another area of camera technology that has improved tremendously over the last few years, but choosing the right settings for the right situations is the key to getting the most out of these advancements. When photographing behaviour, it is virtually impossible to keep an erratic and fast-moving subject in a small area of the frame during the shooting of a sequence. Therefore, I opt for larger autofocus target boxes and use the continuous focus tracking and animal eye detect features to help the camera focus on, and keep track of, my intended subjects. All cameras will have different features and levels of sophistication, but make sure you are in continuous autofocus mode and use a relatively large target area in a central part of the viewfinder – this will improve your success rate.

Another very useful practice is to give your subjects a little more space by zooming out of the scene before firing the shutter. Very often, behaviour sequences will involve erratic and unpredictable movements. If you are too tight to your subjects, then the chances of clipping that outstretched wing, or compromising the composition in some other way, is increased. I have learnt this the hard way, over and over again, missing some incredible shots by framing scenes too tightly.



Decent light allowed 1/4,000 second and f/9 to be used, balanced by 1,000 ISO. This image was taken with older technology without the benefit of fast modern frame rates – observation and timing were the key to capturing the right moment.

IMAGE SPEC

Camera: **Nikon D800E**
Focal length: **500mm**
Exposure: **1,400 sec; ISO 1,000**

By giving the image more room, there is less chance of missing a critical part of the scene and you give yourself more compositional scope in post-production. If nothing else, make this the one big takeaway from this article.

For reasons stated above, I find the versatility of a zoom lens invaluable when photographing behaviour. Not only do they provide a wide range of options when it comes to focal range, but they are also way lighter than most prime lenses. This makes them much easier to handhold and manoeuvre, essential when trying to track fast-moving subjects. Prime lenses will gather more light and generally provide way better autofocus performance, but give me a zoom any day.

Spring is such an exciting time, with plenty of activity upon which to train our lenses. Keep your shutter speed high, shoot a little wider than usual, and make the most of those fast frame rates!

GEARFINDER

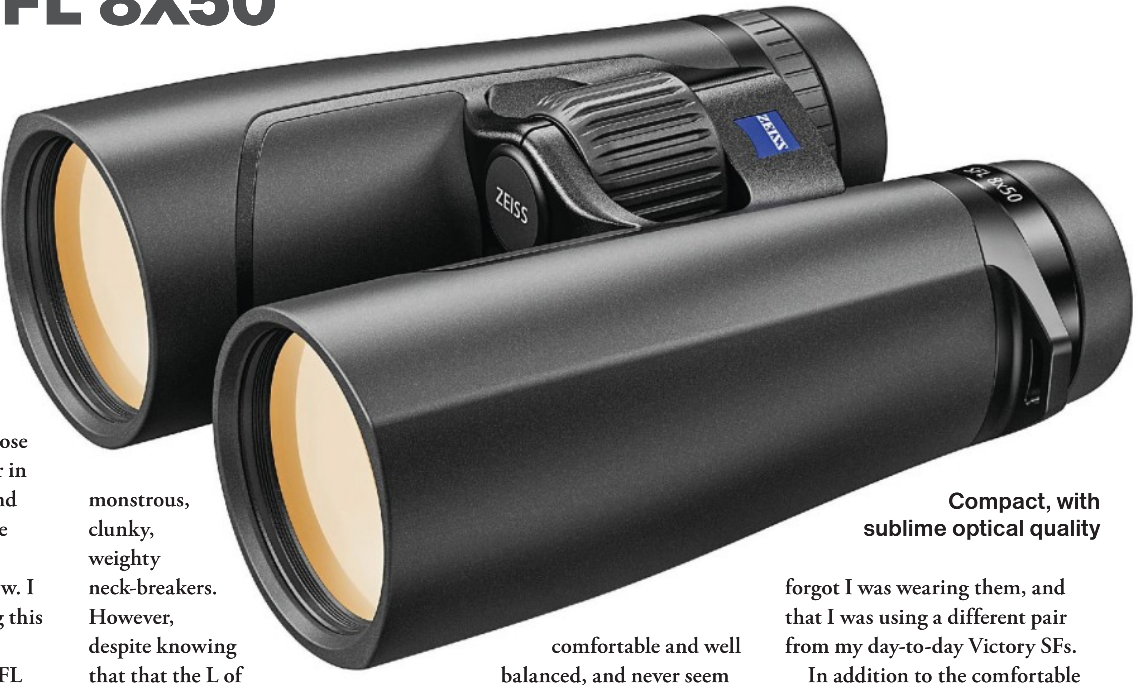
The best optics and outdoor products tried & tested for you

BINOCULARS

ZEISS SFL 8X50

£1,855

Reviewed by Mike Weedon



Compact, with sublime optical quality

In 2022, I reviewed the Zeiss 8x40 SFL binoculars. The main theme was that I compared them with my day-to-day binoculars, which are a Zeiss 8x42 Victory SF pair. And those SFLs, though slightly smaller in objective lens (and overall) and considerably cheaper than the Victory SFs, performed outstandingly well, in my view. I even went as far as describing this feat as seeming like a “minor miracle” and that the 8x40 SFL seemed a “bargain”.

Despite that review, when I was sent the new 8x50 SFL binoculars, I still approached with a certain trepidation. I was partly brought up (as a birdwatcher) on a diet of 10x50 binoculars (including those of the East German Zeiss Jena persuasion), and have a residual memory of them being somewhat monstrous, clunky, weighty neck-breakers. However, despite knowing that that the L of SFL stands for lightweight (SF means ‘smart focus’), I was still shocked by how relatively compact and lightweight the 8x50 SFLs are. Indeed, they are only a little heavier than the 8x42 SFs; and in length measure 16cm (eyecups down), compared to the 17.3cm of the 8x42 SFs.

Worn round the neck they feel comfortable and well balanced, and never seem massive or unwieldy, just ‘normal’, despite the 8mm extra on the diameter of each objective lens. I have said before how I am so used to my regular pair of binoculars that I forget I am wearing them, sometimes (which is a good thing); and reach up with my hand just to check. Well, the same applied to these lightweight 8x50s; I simply forgot I was wearing them, and that I was using a different pair from my day-to-day Victory SFs.

In addition to the comfortable feel of the 8x50s, the twist up rubber eyecups are, in my opinion, a significant improvement over those of the 8x42 SFs. They are big, almost like a scope eyepiece for each eye, and they ‘lock’ into any of five positions (to suit your eye relief requirements) with a distinct click which stays in place very solidly, in use.

The dioptre adjustment comes with a rubber ring on the right eyepiece and is suitably ‘stiff’ and easy to set.

Eyecups are some of the best Mike has experienced

MARC ABBOTT

Optics

But, how are they optically? As with my review three years ago, I tried a slightly unfair field

Surprisingly light in the hand

MARC ABBOTT

comparison with my trusty Victory SFs. The first impression is that both pairs produce a beautiful, natural 'walk-in' image, with the 8x50 SFL's view being slightly brighter (in normal light) to my eyes, very slightly bluer and with a crisp, punchy image. Indeed, it is the same impression I got from the 8x40 SFL pair in 2022, but even brighter. As with many top binoculars, these days, it is a real struggle to find 'problems' like colour fringing/chromatic aberration and there is no noticeable softening to the edge of the image.

To my eyes, the field of view seems very slightly narrower than that of the 8x42 SF, and the close focus distance of the SFL is closer to 1.75m than the 1.5m I found with the SF. The one-and a-half finger wide, ridged rubber focus wheel is beautifully smooth and precise, taking just one and a bit turns from close to infinity.

Zeiss focus wheel: a lesson in precision

Naturally, the larger objective diameter SFLs come into their own in duller or fading light, and this is the key thing about these binoculars. Indeed, Zeiss describe them as "50mm bright. 42mm light". And they are right; Zeiss has very cleverly delivered binoculars with the convenience of size and weight of 42mm (objective diameter) binoculars, yet the brightness and optical quality of 50mm binoculars.

The 50 SFL range includes 10x and 12x as well as the tested 8x pair. The binoculars come with the expected accessories of a nice Zeiss strap, rainguards for the eyecups and objective lens covers, plus a pleasing, case.

As with the smaller (8x40) pair, it seems astonishing to me that such great binoculars, though far from cheap, can be about £800 less expensive that the 8x42 SF pair. Very much worth a look, if you are after a great pair of binoculars.

SPECS

Length: 160mm

Weight: 855g

Field of view: 131m@1,000m

Close focus: 1.8m

Website: www.zeiss.co.uk/consumer-products/nature-observation.html

VERDICT

Bright, light and brilliant. These are binoculars with excellent light gathering, which delivers an exemplary, punchy image yet in a size and weight similar to that of 8x42 binoculars. For binoculars of this high standard, the price is great, too.

OPTICS ★★★★

DESIGN ★★★★★

VALUE ★★★★★

OVERALL ★★★★★

WishList

More stuff to spend your hard-earned cash on

WORDS **DAVID CHANDLER**

PASSENGER MONTEREY ROAM SANDALS £22.95

Let your toes see the sun with these very reasonably priced sandals. The soles are made from recycled rubber and the Monterey Roam "helps you roam further". Do make sure you can find your way back, though. Complete with adjustable straps, grippy soles, a cushioning footbed and support for your insteps. And for every order a tree gets planted. In khaki or black (the sandals not the trees), sizes 7-11. **passenger-clothing.com**

ALPKIT SIGMA 3-LAYER WATERPROOF JACKET £169.99

It's 100% recycled, and recyclable. The DWR is PFC-free and the Sigma is "best in class" for keeping water out and breathability. It has an active cut, with some stretch. Wired-peak hood, hem and cuffs are adjustable. Pockets take an OS map. 400g. Men's XS-XXL. Women's 6-20. In outer space(!), blaze or spruce. **alpkit.com**

MATADOR CAMERA BASE LAYER £74.95

This is for compact DSLR and mirrorless cameras and you can adjust its length to work with different camera-lens combos. It's made from tough Cordura and is padded and rainproof, with a roll-top closure and built-in rain cover. Synthetic down padding provides protection and insulation – to keep batteries going a bit longer when it's cold. It has a zip-pocket for bits and pieces, an aluminium carabiner and a magnetic latch. 28x22.9x2cm (with no camera in). 155g. **wildbounds.com**

COTOPAXI ALLPA 28L TRAVEL PACK DEL DIA £170

Travel light with one of these and feel virtuous knowing it's made from repurposed fabrics. The outer is tough, water-resistant, and made from 100% recycled nylon. There are several pockets inside, a stretchy bottle pocket (take care with stretchy bottles) on the outside, and a zipped accessory pocket on the front. **trekitt.co.uk.**

SONY FE 400-800MM F6.3-8 G OSS LENS £2,549

This is an E-mount lens with fast, precise, quiet AF, "rapid, accurate subject tracking", "outstanding sharpness", "enhanced contrast", "impeccable detail" and Optical SteadyShot IS. Add a teleconverter and you have 1,600mm of up-closeness. 1.7m minimum focus (@400mm). Internal zoom. Dust/moisture resistant. 119.8x346 mm. 2,475g. **Icegroup.co.uk**

CRAGHOPPERS KIWI PRO II WATERPROOF TROUSERS £95

These are waterproof, wind-resistant, breathable, and part-recycled. Tough on the outside but soft on the inside, and with stretch for ease of movement. There's some elastic in the waist (often welcome post tea-room) and zipped pockets. Made in China. Guaranteed for life. Men's 30-42 waist, short/regular/long. Women's 8-20, short/regular/long. Black or black. **craghoppers.com**

BIRDMIC PARABOLIC MICROPHONE £250.99

A 25cm parabolic dish with a mic and more. It's "designed to make wildlife sound recording simple and effective"... It's compact and lightweight and comes with an audio interface that connects to a smartphone (you can use it with Merlin), camera or handheld recorder. Includes headphones, cables, an extension tube for a field recorder, a bag and windshield. There's no 3.5mm to Lightning adapter, though – you can buy that separately. **nhbs.com**

LEICA ULTRAVID COMPACT COLORLINE BINOCULARS £950/£990

These new Leica compacts are designed for "style-conscious adventurers" (that's us, surely?) and "nature lovers". You have the choice of Capri Blue or Apple Green, as an 8x20 (£950) or 10x25 (£990). You get the "highest optical performance and mechanical precision", water-repellent coating on exterior lens surfaces, and a colour-coordinated strap. **leica-camera.com**

RSPB PUFFIN JR CHILDREN'S BINOCULARS £27

These 8x21 binoculars have "exceptional build quality", are lightweight, and made with smaller faces and hands in mind – 7-12-year-olds, to be precise. Apparently, they're available in four different colours, but I could only find two on the website – light green (pictured) and soft yellow. 7.1° field of view, 4m close-focus, 10.5mm eye-relief, 79x100x35mm, 144g (very light). One-year warranty. **shopping.rspb.org.uk**

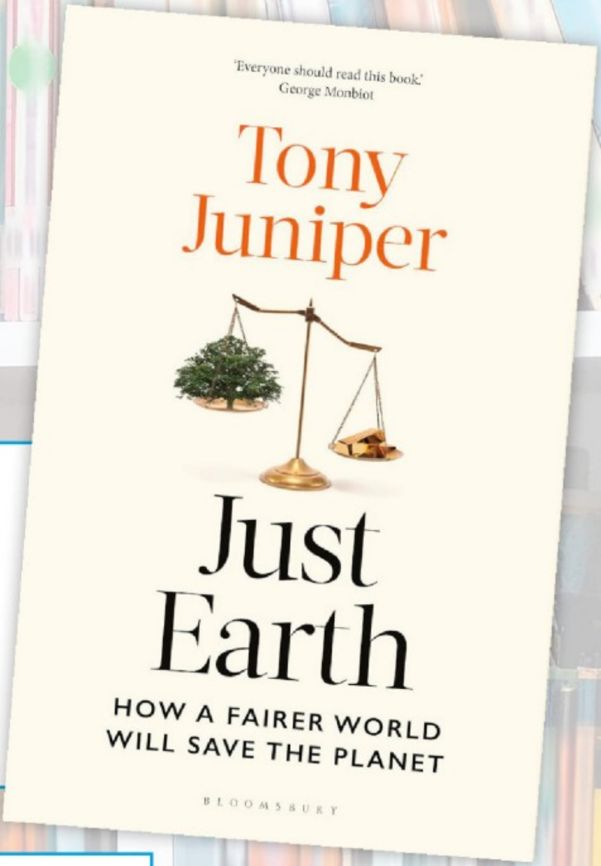
Book Review

John Miles rounds up the latest releases…

BOOK OF THE MONTH

JUST EARTH
BY TONY JUNIPER
BLOOMSBURY, HB, £20

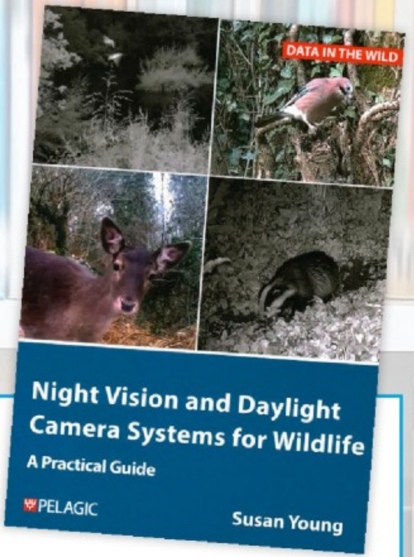
This is a book about our planet that starts and finishes in Middlesbrough – you don't get many of those! It is, of course, because it was the Industrial Revolution which started manmade climate change, and Tony Juniper has had an amazing life working with organisations like Friends of the Earth and Natural England, which are involved in trying to get the planet back on an even keel. There is so much in this one book, looking at the subject as it applies all around the world, in rich countries and poor. Is there an answer? Read this to find out!


'Everyone should read this book.'
George Monbiot
Tony Juniper
Just Earth
HOW A FAIRER WORLD WILL SAVE THE PLANET
BLOOMSBURY

'Funny, informative and charming'
CAROLINE QUENTIN
THE LIFE-AFFIRMING MAGIC OF BIRDS
and the extraordinary things they can teach us
CHARLIE BINGHAM

THE LIFE AFFIRMING MAGIC OF BIRDS
BY CHARLIE BINGHAM
AURUM, HB, £16.99

Charlie Bingham is a Yorkshire lass, and in this book she describes the reasons she got into birding. It wasn't an easy ride for her, with two young lads to bring up as a single mum, and a late entry into university, but there was always something for her to see and learn from. Visits to meet other birding friends and authors add to the stories, and her move to Norfolk certainly gave her some real hotspots to go birding at. Regardless of where you stand in the birding world, you should get something from this book, not least admiration for Charlie's determination to succeed.

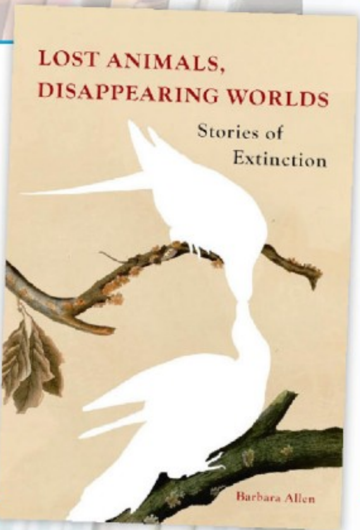

DATA IN THE WILD
Night Vision and Daylight Camera Systems for Wildlife
A Practical Guide
PELAGIC
Susan Young

NIGHT VISION AND DAYLIGHT CAMERA SYSTEMS FOR WILDLIFE
BY SUSAN YOUNG
PELAGIC, SB, £35

This is a book which you definitely need if you want to get the best out of using camera traps. It is full of detail, as it is the work of eight years in the field. Susan is no beginner and has also written a book on photography, and takes classes in it. So, if you're just starting out, this is the ideal guide – there is a lot on the equipment needed and how to set it up for best results. I have only just started myself, so need to take note!

LOST ANIMALS. DISAPPEARING WORLDS
BY BARBARA ALLEN
REAKTION BOOKS, HB, £20

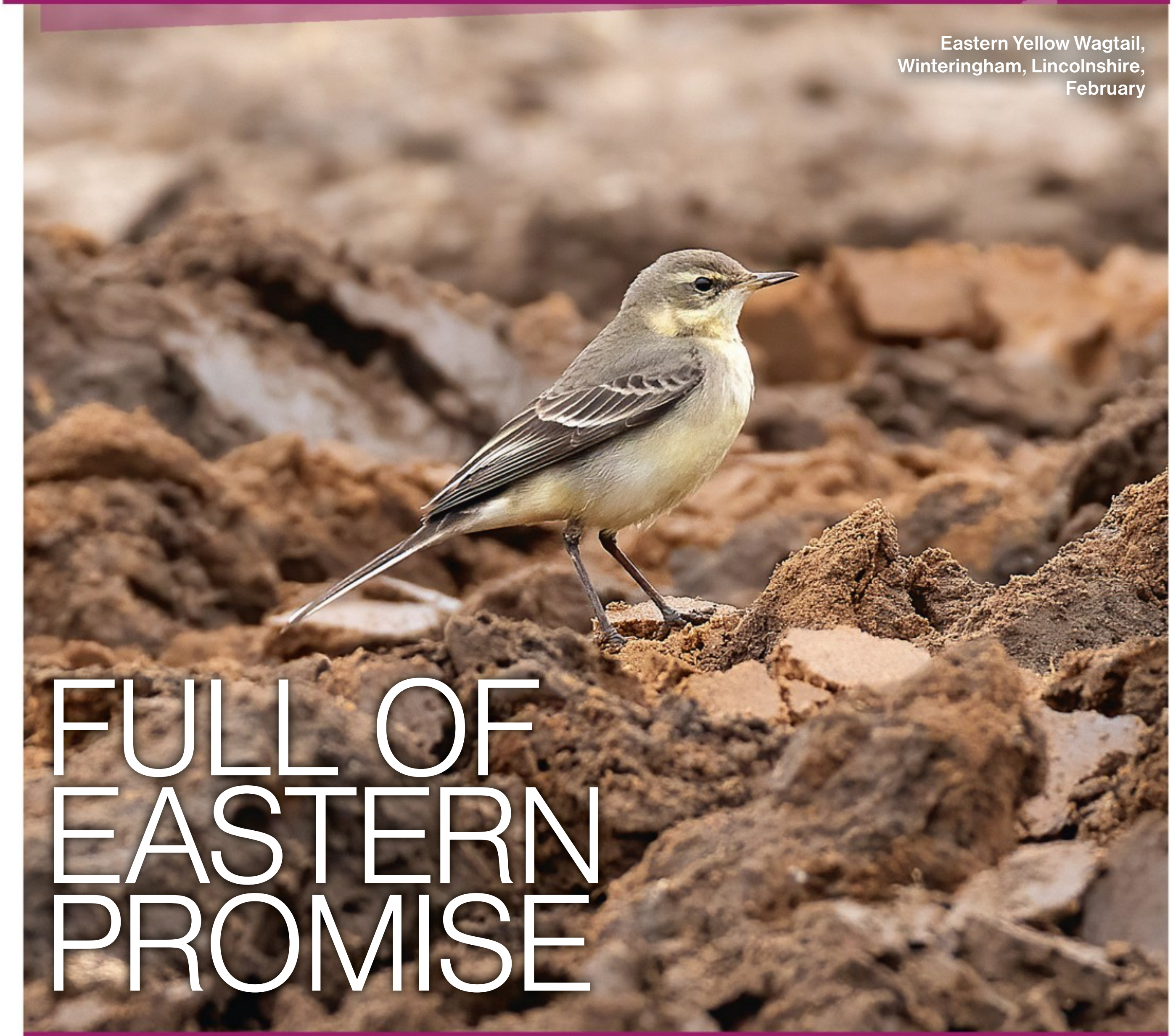
This is the sort of book you'd prefer didn't have so many pages – the more there are, the less full our world is of great species. Those that have sadly gone from our lives should, and do, make us think harder about saving the rest, though – the book covers well known extinct species like Dodo and Great Auk, as well as the likes of Spectacled Cormorant, with only seven stuffed specimens and two incomplete skeletons left on the planet. Other losses covered here include Heath Hen, Arabian Ostrich and Ivory-billed Woodpecker. There are many more lost species in here which we should never forget.


LOST ANIMALS, DISAPPEARING WORLDS
Stories of Extinction
Barbara Allen

UKBIRDSIGHTINGS

The best rare birds seen all around Britain in February

COMPILED BY MIKE WEEDON



Eastern Yellow Wagtail, Winteringham, Lincolnshire, February

GRAHAM CATLEY

FULL OF EASTERN PROMISE

Though Eastern Yellow Wagtail was one of the key 'new' rarities during February, a potential new bird for the UK was the main story of the month

For most of February, the rarest end of the rarity map remained more or less unchanged. But there was to be a dramatic twist on 27th, with news that on the previous day a White Tern (aka Fairy Tern) had been picked up exhausted at Llanberis, Gwynedd. On first hearing that a tropical seabird had been picked up far inland in Wales, you may be forgiven to think the teller of the tail was 'away with the fairies'... However, there have been some almost equally outlandish precedents: think of the odd frigatebird and even White-chinned Petrel powering overhead in Orkney in 2020, or giant petrel spp, or even the recent rash of boobies...

The White Tern in question was found to be of the *candida* group, of the Pacific and Indian Oceans, and it has been pointed out by more than one author, that unlikely though it seems, the species has 'previous' in turning up in extraordinary places. These include Bermuda (which is in the Atlantic, 900 miles east of South Carolina), The Bahamas (Caribbean island group south-east of Florida); plus mainland India, inland South Korea, and New Zealand. The Welsh White Tern (which, sadly, but predictably, died after being taken into care) would be a Western Palearctic 'first', and with none (apparently) kept in captivity in the country, surely it has a chance of acceptance to The British List. But, with birds such as this, which are never going to be 'tickable' by anyone

IS YOUR AREA COVERED?

If your county doesn't currently feature in UKBS and you'd like to supply a regular report, email **matthew.merritt@bauermedia.co.uk** for details of how you can help. You can send rare bird photos to **mike.weedon@bauermedia.co.uk** Please send unprocessed JPEGs at 300dpi

Bufflehead,
Loch of Hillwell, Shetland,
February

HUGH HARROP

Lesser White-fronted Geese,
Ken Hill Marshes, Norfolk,
1 February

RICHARD STONER

Green-winged Teal, Newport, Pembrokeshire, 22 February

RICHARD STONIER

Pallid Harrier, Wighton, Norfolk, February

ROBIN CHITTENDEN (WWW.ROBINCHITTENDEN.CO.UK)

Glossy Ibis, Slimbridge, Gloucestershire, 3 February

ANDREW JORDAN

other than the finder, it is hard for many birders to get overexcited about this potential new British bird.

New birds and lingerers

New rarities for February included a first-winter Eastern Yellow Wagtail at Winteringham, Lincolnshire (from 19th to the morning of 28th). On 23rd, a male Black-throated Thrush was found at Bordon, Hampshire, in that most favoured habitat of Black-throated Thrushes, a private garden. Within a few days, access arrangements were established, with viewing from a neighbouring garden in exchange for a donation. The handsome thrush remained until early March.

The main headline rare birds elsewhere included the pale-morph Booted Eagle continuing its stay in the Marazion area, Cornwall, well into March. The drake Bufflehead settled down at its preferred site of Loch of Hillwell, Mainland, Shetland, while the American Coot remained at Loch of Spiggie on the same island, both throughout the month. A Ross's Goose was also on Shetland's Mainland, at Voe of Scatsta and Toft, while another 'of unknown origin' was at Raith Reservoir and Galston Road Loch, Ayrshire; and another was at Muasdale, Argyll.

A Ross's Gull was at Ardivachar Point, South Uist, Outer Hebrides on 5th.

The Least Sandpiper remained at Steart WWT, Somerset, throughout February. Meanwhile, gaggles of Lesser White-fronted Geese, from the Swedish reintroduction programme, continued to wander the fields of north Norfolk. The obliging Buff-bellied Pipit (aka American Pipit) continued to show off at Ross Bank Sands, Northumberland, to 10th.

Mention should be made of a dark-breasted Barn Owl of the subspecies *guttata* (from central and eastern Europe), which appeared just east of Bourne in south Lincolnshire, in the last week of the month. Though owls looking like this are reported with some frequency, genuine examples of this distinctively coloured and very handsome race are rare, with just 13 accepted UK all-time records (including shot 19th Century birds!).

SOUTH WEST

Highlights

In association with Rare Bird Alert

The rarest bird of the month was the Booted Eagle, continuing its protracted stay in Cornwall, mostly around the Marazion area. On the other side of the bay, a Pacific Diver was seen off Mousehole, Newlyn and Penzance.

AVON

CLEVEDON-WESTON-SUPER-MARE: Seven Goosanders were on the Blind Yeo. Clevedon-Yeo had 12 Grey Plovers (16th), and a Marsh Harrier (8th). Uphill had a Sanderling (25th). A Great White Egret was at Clevedon Moor (6th). The Black Redstart remained near Clevedon Pier. Sand Point had 326 Shelducks and 2,900 Dunlins (16th).
SEVERNSIDE: Avon's earliest ever Wheatear was at New Passage (18th). The River Avon had 70 Avocets (22nd). Northwick Warth had a Brent Goose (7th-9th), and five Knot (27th). Three Jack Snipe were at Chittening Warth (25th). There was just one Bar-tailed and seven Black-tailed Godwits. Battery Point held eight Purple Sandpipers. Severnside had a Common Scoter migrating at night (27th), Marsh Harrier, Merlin, Short-eared Owl, Water Pipit, Hawfinch and Brambling. Oldbury Power Station had a Mediterranean Gull (22nd), Marsh Harrier, and two Black Redstarts. Littleton Warth had a Green-winged Teal (17th).
THE RESERVOIRS: The first Sand Martin was at Chew (23rd). Chew also had a Red-Breasted Merganser (to 2nd), 90 Goldeneyes , four Scaup, a Slavonian Grebe, three Black-necked Grebes, four Mediterranean Gulls, a Yellow-legged Gull, three Marsh Harriers, and two Bearded Tits. Egrets included 50 Cattle, 45 Little and 60 Great White. Two Glossy Ibises were at Chew Magna (to 5th). Blagdon had a Ring-necked Duck, 13 Goldeneyes, a Scaup and Siberian Chiffchaff. The Great Northern Diver was at Barrow Gurney (to 5th), then Chew (6th).
OTHER SITES: Yate had eight Goosanders. Yatton had two Green Sandpipers. The Yellow-browed Warbler remained in a Henleaze garden. Saltford had three Jack Snipe, a Mediterranean Gull, eight Redpolls and 17 Yellowhammers. Corston had a Brambling, 2,000 Chaffinches and 700 Linnets. Tristis Chiffchaffs remained at Compton Dando, Chew Stoke (two) and Montpelier, Bristol. A Crossbill was at Lord's Wood near Pensford. Hawfinches were at Wickwar, Newton St Loe, Willsbridge and Frenchay. Marshfield held a Merlin, Brambling, 20 Yellowhammers, 200 Corn Buntings and 500 Linnets.

A Water Pipit was at Lamplighters Marsh, Bristol (26th). A few Golden Plovers were at three sites. Up to three Firecrests were at 12 sites. Parties of passage Stonechats were at several locations.
Nick Page

CORNWALL

WEST CORNWALL: Long-stayers included the Booted Eagle around the Marazion area, the Velvet Scoter at Mounts Bay, and the Spoonbill and Ring-billed Gull at Hayle. The Mounts Bay area had a Pacific Diver (1st-23rd), and an impressive 94 Red-throated Divers (28th). Perranuthnoe had six Black-throated Divers (1st) and a Yellow-browed Warbler (1st-23rd). A Serin was at St. Buryan (1st). Iceland Gulls were at Mousehole (4th), Marazion (9th) and Hayle (1st-26th). A Pied Crow was at Penryn (8th-9th). Little Gulls were at Pendeen (4th), Marazion (5th) and Hayle (26th). Hayle had Glaucous and Caspian Gulls (5th-18th), and a Jack Snipe (6th). A Bonaparte's Gull was at Sennen (16th). There were 69 Purple Sandpipers at Penzance (6th).Two Scaup were at Stithians (20th-26th). Two Sand Martins were over St. Buryan (25th). The first Wheatear was at Roche (26th). A Ring Ouzel was at Porthleven (28th).
CENTRAL AND NORTH CORNWALL: The Long-tailed Duck remained on Newquay boating lake. Two Spoonbills were at Walmsley (20th). The Black Guillemot was seen again off Falmouth (8th). Trevone Bay had 52 Red-throated Divers (9th). A Green-winged Teal was at Bude (10th). There were 16 Cattle Egrets at Wadebridge (17th). A Pink-footed Goose was at North Petherwin (10th). Par had a Velvet Scoter (19th). Two Red-necked Grebes were at Helford (28th).
SE CORNWALL: Three Ring-necked Ducks were on Dozmary Pool (16th-28th). Three Spoonbills were at Wacker Quay (3rd). Two Yellow-browed Warblers were at St. John (3rd). Torpoint had four Black-necked Grebes (3rd), and a Slavonian Grebe (26th). Downderry had nine Red-throated Divers (3rd). Millbrook Lake had a Pintail (6th) and Scaup (28th). The Slavonian Grebe remained at Hannafore. A Little Gull was at Siblyback Reservoir (27th).
Deena Sharp

DEVON

HIGHLIGHTS: The Long-billed Dowitcher remained at Turf (1st-28th). A Ring-necked Duck was at Portworthy (1st-12th), with one at Roadford Reservoir (10th), and one at Slapton Ley (14th-27th). A Scaup was at Slapton Ley (16th). A Green-winged Teal was at Yelland (16th-17th), with one at Instow (22nd-24th). A Lesser Scaup was at Northam Burrows CP (3rd-25th). A Surf Scoter was off Broadsands (5th-27th).

ISLES OF SCILLY

HIGHLIGHTS: The islands' second Franklin's Gull was on St Martin's (13th). Two Great White Egrets were noted. A Spoonbill was still on Samson at the end of the month. The Velvet Scoter reappeared in Tresco Channel. Between the islands, there was a Black-throated Diver, Common Scoter and up to 42 Great Northern Divers. Firecrests were in Holy Vale and Carreg Dhu Gardens. The Great Spotted Woodpecker remained in the Holy Vale area. A Pintail was at Porth Hellick. The Hen Harrier was in the Salakee/Holy Vale area all month. The two Cattle Egret were usually on St Mary's, but were back on Tresco at the month's end. A Jack Snipe was in Lower Moors (4th, 8th-9th and 12th). A Slavonian Grebe was off St Mary's (8th and 28th). A Raven flew over Longstone and three Red-breasted Mergansers were near Samson (16th). Tresco had a Firecrest and Black Redstart (16th), with four Whimbrels at Bar Point. December's Pied Crow was over St Martins and Tresco (19th), before relocating to St Mary's. A Lapwing was on Tresco, two Red-breasted Mergansers off Bant's Carn, and a Buzzard on St Mary's (19th). A White Wagtail flew over Longstone (21st). A Buzzard was over Longstone (24th and 26th). A Marsh Harrier flew over Samson (28th. A White Wagtail was over Longstone, along with a small passage of finches and pipits (28th).
Will Wagstaff

Black Redstart, Peterborough, Cambs, 2 February

MIKE WEEDON

SOMERSET

HIGHLIGHTS: Steart WWT had a first-winter Least Sandpiper (1st-19th) and a Little Stint. Ham Wall RSPB had up to three Glossy Ibises, and a Ring-necked Duck. The Baikal Teal was at Shapwick Heath NNR (1st-), plus up to two Ring-necked Ducks. Catcott Lows NR had a Green-winged Teal. The Kentish Plover remained at Burnham-on-Sea. A Rose-coloured Starling was in a private garden at Monkton Heathfield (28th).

WILTSHIRE

The drake Ring-necked Duck remained at Fonthill Lake all month. Hawfinches were regular at Grittleton, the largest count being 31. A Brent Goose was briefly on the Melksham floods, a Caspian Gull and Yellow-legged Gull were at Cockey Down and Siberian Chiffchaffs were found at Westbury and Hullavington. Salisbury Plain was excellent for both Short-eared Owls and Hen Harriers and both species were also reported from Pertwood. Waders included Green Sandpipers and Jack Snipe at Longbridge Deverill and Woodcocks at Great Ridge Wood, Leigh Delamere and Blakehill. Six Crossbills were at Gasper and 24 Chiffchaffs at Westbury STW but the only Chaffinch flock of note was 100 at Colerne and only a single Brambling was reported. Redpolls were at Lea and Thickwood, a sizeable flock of Greenfinches was at Corsham and the Middle Woodford Corn Bunting flock remained at around 250. Goosander numbers increased to 21 at Corsham and two Egyptian Geese were at Langford Lakes. Egrets included Greats at six sites and Cattle at Britford, Chippenham, Highworth, Longhedge and Sutton Veny.
Rob Turner

SOUTH EAST

Highlights

In association with Rare Bird Alert

A Black-throated Thrush was found in private gardens in Bordon, Hampshire, and access duly arranged (for a fee). Ferruginous Ducks were in London (at Tooting Bec Common) and West Hyde GP, Hertfordshire.

BEDFORDSHIRE

HIGHLIGHTS: There were up to 15 Hawfinches at Southill Woods.
Robin Chittenden. For the latest bird news please phone 09068 700 245. Calls to 09068 700 245 cost 65p per minute plus your phone company access charge. Service provided by Birdline East Anglia for enquiries please call 07941 333 970. www.birdlineeastanglia.co.uk

BERKSHIRE

HIGHLIGHTS: There were up to 10 Hawfinches at Basildon Park, two at Combe Wood (20th), and singles at Aldermaston (11th-12th), and Sunninghill (25th). Marsh Harriers were at Padworth Lane Floods (2nd and 14th), Fobney Meadow (9th and 17th), and Moor Green Lakes (17th). Jubilee River had a Smew (12th and 23rd). A Merlin was at Ashmore Green (17th). A Cattle Egret was at Chamberhouse Marsh (25th), with two there (28th).
Elaine Charlson

HERTFORDSHIRE

HIGHLIGHTS: A Richard's Pipit was at Bury Field, Newport Pagnell (from 17th). Two Cranes were at Gallows Bridge Farm (22nd), with a Kittiwake there (2nd). Black Redstarts were at Logistica Flood (1st-19th) and Bradenham (27th). Nine White-fronted Geese were at Aylesbury STW (15th). Another was at Dorney Common (8th), with a Brent Goose there (3rd-25th). Eight Hawfinches flew over Aston Clinton (13th), with another in a Stoke Goldington garden (19th, 24th and 28th). There were three Cattle Egrets in Shabbington, and one at Dorney Common (3rd).
Paul Gibbs

Glaucous Gull,
Old Hunstanton, Norfolk,
1 February

RICHARD STONIER

HAMPSHIRE

BLASHFORD LAKES: Regulars included the long-staying Red-crested Pochard, 30 Goldeneyes, a Black-necked Grebe and Great White Egret. Two Cranes flew over Fordingbridge (27th). Two Great White Egrets were at Harbridge. A Ruff was at Avon Causeway (15th).

LANGSTONE HARBOUR: There was an Eider, Slavonian Grebe (11th), and five Black-necked Grebes. Farlington Marshes had two Spoonbills and a Water Pipit. The three Scaup remained off Milton Common. Nine Cattle Egrets were at Warblington. There were three Velvet Scoters (13th) and a Red-necked Grebe (15th) off Gunner Point. Sandy Point had two Common Scoters, three Slavonian Grebes (1st), a Black-necked Grebe (5th), and four Great Northern Divers plus 18 Red-throated Divers (1st).

LYMINGTON-KEYHAVEN: There were five Eiders, two Goldeneyes, 14 Red-breasted Mergansers, four Slavonian Grebes, a Spotted Redshank, seven Greenshanks, a Little Gull (1st-2nd), 20 Spoonbills and a Short-eared Owl (16th).

TITCHFIELD HAVEN-WARSASH: The three Glossy Ibis remained along the Titchfield canal path, rising to four (22nd). Three Water Pipits were there (9th). The Haven had three Spoonbills, and a Merlin (2nd). Offshore were 34 Eiders, six Velvet Scoters, 34 Common Scoters, a Long-tailed Duck (11th-17th), Red-necked Grebe (11th), Slavonian Grebe (1st) and two Great Northern Divers.

OTHER SITES: Hampshire's first Black-throated Thrush was in Bordon (23rd-28th). Lepe had a Velvet Scoter (10th), two Slavonian Grebes (11th), Spotted Redshanks (3rd and 15th), a Black-throated Diver (10th), two Great Northern Divers and seven Spoonbills. The upper Southampton Water area held a Long-tailed Duck, Red-necked Grebe, Slavonian Grebe (1st and 5th), Black-throated Diver (7th) and three Great Northern Divers. A Red-necked Grebe was off Southsea Castle (2nd, and 12th-13th).

A Great Grey Shrike was at Goodworth Clatford (8th-9th). Fishlake Meadows had two Bitterns, three Cattle Egrets (22nd) and four Great White Egrets. Southsea Castle and Daedalus Airfield each hosted two Black Redstarts, with singles at Winchester College, Calshot, Gosport and Calmore. Two Water Pipits were on the Alresford watercress beds.

Tom Jordan

KENT

HIGHLIGHTS: Dungeness RSPB had a redhead Smew (12th-28th) and a Black-necked Grebe (12th). Dungeness NNR had a Stone-curlew over (25th). Elmley NNR had a Tundra Bean Goose (1st), one was at Worth Marsh RSPB (14th-17th), and one was at Harty Ferry (25th). Oare Marshes NR had two Glossy Ibises (5th), and a male Hen Harrier (5th). A presumed escaped Lesser White-fronted Goose was at Shellness/Swale NNR (1st-19th), plus more than 35 White-fronted Geese, and a Short-eared Owl. A redhead Smew was at Seaton GP (1st-2nd). At least four Serins were at Sandwich Bay (18th-19th). A White Stork was over Godmersham (23rd).

SURREY

HIGHLIGHTS: The Little Bunting remained at Send (1st-19th). A female Ring-necked Duck was at Alfold (23rd- 28th). At least two Goshawks were at Dick Focks Common, Effingham Forest (5th-10th). A female Bearded Tit was at Shalford (8th). A Siberian Chiffchaff was at Papercourt Water Meadows (12th), with one at Unstead SF (24th). A Black-necked Grebe was at Island Barn Reservoir (15th-16th). Frensham Great Pond had a Brent Goose (23rd).

Hawfinches were at Box Hill NT (60-plus), Newlands Corner (40+), Capel, Ranmore Common (18), Effingham Forest (22), Mickleham (400+), Leatherhead (seven), Headley Heath (four), Great Bookham (21), and Polesden Lacy (five).

SUSSEX

EAST SUSSEX: Up to four Tundra Bean Geese were at Scotney GP (1st), where there was a Hen Harrier (5th) and a Scaup (22nd-27th). Rye Harbour NR had up to two Spoonbills, Spotted Redshank, and up to two Black-necked Grebes. Pett Level had 40+ White-fronted Geese (16th), and a Slavonian Grebe on the sea (28th). Three Short-eared Owls were at Southease (1st), with three at Rodmell (2nd). Purple Sandpipers were at Tide Mills and Newhaven. A Siberian Chiffchaff was at Combe Valley CP (22nd). A male Black Redstart was at Splash Point (13th-24th), with a female-type bird at Seven Sisters CP (19th). Hawfinches were at Crowborough, Fletching, Hastings and Withyham.

WEST SUSSEX: Pulborough Brooks RSPB had a Water Pipit (5th), Osprey (6th), Hawfinch, two Bewick's Swans, and an adult Little Gull (25th). Amberley Wild Brooks NT had a Hen Harrier (5th). A Hen Harrier was at The Burgh (1st-16th). A Siberian Chiffchaff was at Lidsey (2nd). Two Bewick's Swans were at Burpham (9th-13th). A Black Redstart was at Findon (12th), with one at Warnham LNR (15th), one at Shoreham-by-Sea (19th), and one at Elmer (28th). Hawfinches were at Watersfield, Knepp Castle Estate (10+), Harting Down (50), Westdean Woods (65), Kingley Vale NR (400), Rewell Wood (160), Crawley and West Hoathly.

EAST ANGLIA

Highlights

In association with Rare Bird Alert

Rare birds in the region during February included the drake Canvasback still at Abberton Reservoir, Essex, Pallid Harrier at Warham Greens etc in north Norfolk, and also in north Norfolk, up to 24 Lesser White-fronted Geese (from the Swedish reintroduction scheme).

CAMBRIDGESHIRE

HIGHLIGHTS: A Ferruginous Duck was at Fen Drayton (from 17th). Two Glossy Ibises were at Peakirk (3rd), with another over Hilton (28th). Two Great Northern Divers were at Grafham Water, and one at Beeby's BP (12th-22nd). Glaucous Gulls were at Ouse Fen (1st-9th), Smithey Fen (4th) and Cottenham (6th). Two Tundra Bean Geese were just north of the Nene Washes (to 2nd), and one at Kingfishers Bridge (1st). A Smew was at Meadow Lane GP (16th).

A Garganey was at Burwell Fen (2nd and 22nd), and the Cam Washes (7th). One or two Black Redstarts were at Waterbeach (to 17th), with singles at Beeby's BP (2nd and 6th), CEGB Reservoir (2nd), Yaxley (2nd), Peterborough City Hospital (4th), Litlington (5th) and Northstowe (18th and 20th).

Robin Chittenden. For the latest bird news please phone 09068 700 245. Calls to 09068 700 245 cost 65p per minute plus your phone company access charge. Service provided by Birdline East Anglia for enquiries please call 07941 333 970. www.birdlineeastanglia.co.uk

ESSEX

HIGHLIGHTS: Abberton Reservoir had a Canvasback (to 23rd), two Lesser Scaup, two Ring-necked Ducks, a Black-throated Diver, Great Northern Diver, 16 Black-necked Grebes, two Slavonian Grebes and four Smew. A Great Grey Shrike was at Copt Hall Marshes (to 22nd). King George V Reservoir had a Black-throated Diver, two Great Northern Divers, three Black-necked Grebes, two Slavonian Grebe and a Smew. Goldhanger had six Black-necked Grebes and six Slavonian Grebes (1st).

The Blackwater Estuary had a Red-necked Grebe off Tollesbury Wick (3rd), up to four Slavonian Grebes (3rd-12th) and three Black-necked Grebes (6th). A Slavonian Grebe was off West Mersea (25th). A Green-winged Teal was at Fisher's Green (13th-14th). A Smew was at Hooks Marsh (3rd-8th). Black Brants were at West Mersea, Great Wakering Fleethead (1st) and Northey Island (21st).

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NORFOLK

HIGHLIGHTS: The Pallid Harrier roosted regularly at Warham Greens and was also seen at North Point Pools, Warham camp (22nd) and Wighton (28th). Twenty-four Lesser White-fronted Geese were at Ken Hill Marshes (to 24th), with nine between Wighton and Warham Camp (from 14th), and seven at Stiffkey (from 24th). Tundra Bean Geese included up to five at Welney (from 9th), and five between Horsey and West Somerton (11th), at Berney Marshes (12th), and Holkham Freshmarsh (14th). Black Brants were at Snettisham and Thornham Harbour. A Waxwing was at Dersingham (17th-18th).

Shore Larks included six at Old Hunstanton and eight at Holkham Gap. A Glaucous Gull at Old Hunstanton was also seen at Thornham Harbour. Another was seen intermittently at Waxham, Horsey Gap, Winterton and Eccles-on-Sea. Glossy Ibises were at Burgh Castle and Stiffkey, with two over Cley Marshes (15th). A Red-necked Grebe was at Whitlingham CP (to 15th). A Black-necked Grebe was at Welney (from 9th). A Slavonian Grebe was at Hickling Broad (1st-5th).

Siberian Chiffchaff, Walsey Hills, Cley, Norfolk, 6 February

STEVE GANTLETT

NOA HOLME BIRD OBSERVATORY: Maxima included two Hen Harriers, 20 Snow Buntings, 19 Red-breasted Mergansers, 12 Eiders, 89 Red-throated Divers, 60 Golden Plovers, 130 Lapwings, 32 Oystercatchers, five Grey Plovers, two Ringed Plovers, 35 Curlews, five Sanderling, four Redshanks, 30 Common Scoters, two Ravens, three Avocets, two Mediterranean Gulls, three Great White Egrets, five Shore Larks, and a Merlin, Little Gull, Barn Owl, Fulmar, Grey Wagtail, Chiffchaff, Knot, Greenshank, Peregrine and Cattle Egret.

NOA REDWELL MARSH: There were two Cattle Egrets, two Marsh Harriers, a Buzzard, Sparrowhawk, two Goldcrests, a Red Kite, Moorhen, Redshank, two Mute Swans, 115 Wigeon, 125 Teal and six Shovelers.

CLEY AREA: Highlights included a Velvet Scoter, 10 Ruff, two Long-tailed Ducks, 1,200 Common Scoters, a Hen Harrier, Mediterranean Gull, two Siberian Chiffchaffs, a Merlin, Whooper Swan, 45 Pintails, two Water Pipits, a Little Gull, five Bewick's Swans, 41 Great Crested Grebes, an Eider, Spoonbill, Woodcock, two Pochards, a Tufted Duck, Short-eared Owl, Green Sandpiper and eight Avocets.

Sophie Barker (www.noa.org.uk) and Robin Chittenden. For the latest bird news please phone 09068 700 245. Calls to 09068 700 245 cost 65p per minute plus your phone company access charge. Service provided by Birdline East Anglia for enquiries please call 07941 333 970. www.birdlineeastanglia.co.uk

SUFFOLK

HIGHLIGHTS: The Ring-necked Duck was either at Thorpeness Meare or North Warren. A Red-necked Grebe was at Carlton Marshes (13th-14th). Two Slavonian Grebes were in Holbrook Bay (7th, 13th and 17th), with two at Melton (8th). The Black-throated Diver was on the River Orwell (to 21st). Two Great Northern Divers were on the River Orwell, with another at Aldeburgh (from 5th).

A Tundra Bean Geese was at Trimley Marshes and Levington (1st-12th). Eight flew north (6th). A Glaucous Gull was at Sizewell (7th), and Minsmere (7th-8th and 17th). A Shore Lark was at Kessingland. The Hooded Crow remained at Botany Marsh.

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Shore Lark, Holkham, Norfolk, 2 February

RICHARD STONIER

Spoonbill,
Slimbridge, Gloucestershire,
18 February

ANDREW JORDAN

MIDLANDS

Highlights

In association with Rare Bird Alert

Probably the rarest bird in the Midlands was once again Lesser Scaup, a first winter female at Carsington Water, Derbyshire, where there was also a female Ring-necked Duck.

DERBYSHIRE

HIGHLIGHTS: An Eastern-race Lesser Whitethroat came to a feeder in Swadlincote. Carsington Water had a Great Northern Diver, Red-throated Diver, two Scaup, a Ring-necked Duck (to 26th), Lesser Scaup (to 25th), and Black-necked Grebe (24th). Carr Vale had a Bearded Tit (2nd). White-fronted Geese were at Ingleby (from 19th) and Staunton Harold Reservoir (18th-21st). A Barnacle Goose, of unknown origin, was at Barrow GP (1st), Melbourne Pool (4th) and Staunton Harold Reservoir (12th-27th), where there was also a Ruddy Shelduck (from 17th). A Black Redstart was at Whitwell (23rd). A Knot was at Willington Wetlands (25th). The Red-crested Pochard remained at Wingerworth.

ASTON ON TRENT GP: There was a Marsh Harrier and Green Sandpiper.

BARROW GP: There was a Shelduck, Marsh Harrier, 300 Lapwings, Green Sandpiper and Caspian Gull.

BENNERLEY MARSH: There was a Jack Snipe, 20 Lesser Redpolls, a Caspian Gull, Golden Plover and Blackcap.

CARR VALE: There were flocks of 450 and 105 Pinkfeet, a Red Kite, two Grey Partridges, a Golden Plover and Woodcock.

CARSINGTON WATER: There were five Whooper Swans, 700 Pinkfeet, a Pintail, Oystercatcher, Dunlin, Woodcock, Curlew, Redshank, Mediterranean Gull, Yellow-legged Gull, Caspian Gull, Willow Tit, and Brambling.

COMMON FARM: There were 1,480 Pinkfeet, 165 Fieldfares, 125 Redwings, three Curlews, a Woodcock and 55 Greenfinches.

DRAKELOW: There were 258 Cormorants, four Oystercatchers, nine Woodcocks and 140 Greenfinches.

MIDDLETON MOOR: There were three Whooper Swans, a Marsh Harrier, Jack Snipe, 91 Curlews and a Caspian Gull.

OGSTON RESERVOIR: There were four Whooper Swans, three Pintails, an Oystercatcher, Woodcock, 12 Curlews, a Mediterranean Gull, Yellow-legged Gull, Caspian Gull and Brambling.

SINFIN MOOR WETLANDS: There was a Marsh Harrier, 400 Chaffinches and 23 Yellowhammers.

WILLINGTON WETLANDS: There were five Cattle Egrets, a Great White Egret, Pintail, Marsh Harrier, Oystercatcher, Woodcock, 15 Curlews and a Redshank.

WYVER LANE: There was a Woodcock, Mediterranean Gull and 50 Siskins.

OTHER SITES: Pinkfeet flew over Pleasley Colliery (200) and Beeley Moor (1,830). Hawfinches were at Brackenfield, Cromford, and Darley Dale (12). Linnets included 400 at Church Wilne and 300 Dunston. Bakewell had a Mediterranean Gull. Brampton had 196 Golden Plovers.

Dove Holes Quarry had a Yellow-legged Gull. Trent Lock had three Cattle Egrets. Weston Grange had a Ringed Plover. Snipe and Jack Snipe were widespread.

Steve Thorpe

GLOUCESTERSHIRE

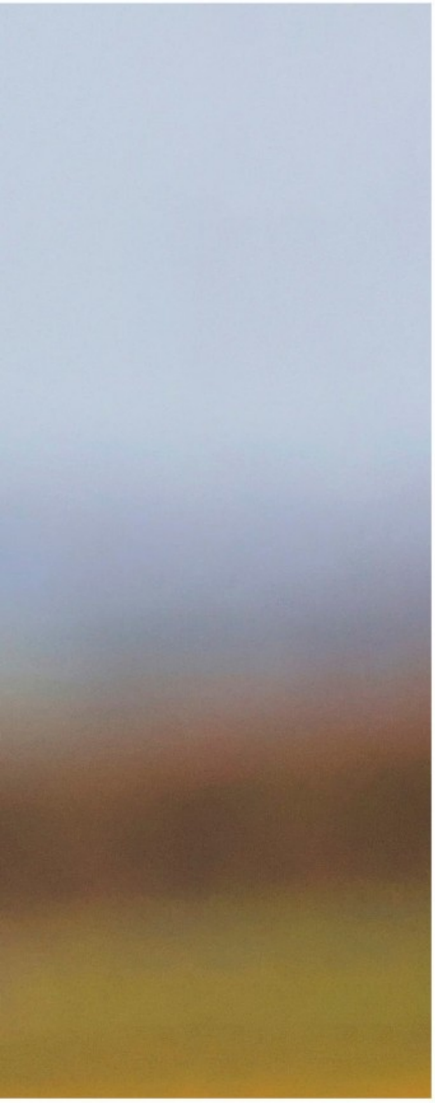
COTSWOLDS: A Hen Harrier flew over Hawling (14th). Black Redstarts were at Tresham (12th) and Aldsworth (24th). Cotswold Lakes had 30 Goosanders, three Great White Egrets, a Marsh Harrier and three Green Sandpipers. A Merlin was near Naunton (3rd). A Hawfinch was at Tetbury (28th).

FOREST OF DEAN: Eight Goosanders were at Woorgreens, with four at Speech House Lake and four at Cannop Ponds. Hawfinches included seven at Parkend, six at Speech House, and singles in a Coleford garden, at Newnham, and Kempley. Four Goshawks were seen from New Fancy View. A Water Rail was at Soudley Ponds. There were 140 Siskins at Newent Woods.

LOWER SEVERN VALE: A Richard's Pipit at Awre (from 27th), was presumably a returning individual. The Frampton Pools and Saul Warth had a Goldeneye, 34 Snipe, a Common Sandpiper, Great White Egret and Brambling. Merlins were near Lydney (12th), and over the M5 near Cam (26th).Berkeley Shore had 30 Turnstones and a Common Sandpiper. A Turnstone was at Guscar Rocks. A Jack Snipe was at Walmore Common.

SLIMBRIDGE WWT: Highlights included a Bearded Tit (25th), two Green-winged Teal, two Spoonbills, a Glossy Ibis, 72 Bewick's Swans, two Whooper Swans, 133 White-fronted Geese, the Pink-footed Goose of unknown origin, three Goldeneyes, two Goosanders, 16 Cattle Egrets, two Great White Egrets, 80 Avocets, a Ringed Plover, two Little Stints, 24 Ruff, three Marsh Harriers and a Firecrest.

UPPERSEVERNVALE: Coombe Hill Meadows had a Ring-necked Duck, Jack Snipe, 30 Snipe, two Great White Egrets, three Marsh



Harriers. There were 23 Little Egrets at Leigh Meadows. Great White Egrets were at The Mythe at Tewkesbury, Ashleworth Ham and Maisemore Ham. A Black Redstart remained in the Linden area of Gloucester.

A Jack Snipe was at Minsterworth Ham. A Goosander flew over Pittville Park, Cheltenham.

Andy Jayne (07919 278 806)

LEICESTERSHIRE

HIGHLIGHTS: Eyebrook Reservoir had up to five Smew (1st-28th) and a Scaup (3rd-21st). A Little Gull was briefly at Groby Pool (8th). Caspian Gulls were at Cropston Reservoir and Groby Pool, and an Iceland Gull was at Shawell (27th-28th).

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

HIGHLIGHTS: The Glossy Ibis remained at Summer Leys, as did the Great Northern Diver at Pitsford Reservoir. A Ring-necked Duck was at Thrapston GP (3rd-12th and from 28th), also visiting Ringstead GP (13th). Smew were at Ravensthorpe Reservoir (1st) and Clifford Hill GP (from 2nd). A Red-breasted Merganser was at Blatherwycke Lake (9th-14th). A White-fronted Goose at Cogenhoe (1st), was joined by six more (to 28th), with two more at Ravensthorpe Reservoir.

A Hen Harrier visited Blueberry Farm, Maidwell (19th). A Black Redstart was at Creaton (20th). A Hawfinch was at Cottesbrooke (5th and 8th). One or two Siberian Chiffchaffs were at Ecton STW (16th-19th). An early Avocet was at Summer Leys (27th). Cattle Egrets were at Blatherwycke Lake, Ditchford GP, Summer Leys and Stanwick GP (three).

CLIFFORD HILL GP: There were three Common Scoters, a Black-tailed Godwit, two Ringed Plovers, Caspian and Yellow-legged Gulls, and two Stonechats.

DAVENTRY CP: A Bittern (19th) was a site first. There was a Red-crested Pochard for most of the month.

EARLS BARTON GP: There was a Marsh Harrier, Bittern, Scaup, Red-crested Pochard, Pink-footed Goose, three Great White Egrets, a Peregrine, two Yellow-legged Gulls, four Stonechats, three Black-tailed Godwits, 220 Golden Plovers, three Green Sandpipers, a Common Sandpiper, Dunlin and 30 Snipe.

HOLLOWELL RESERVOIR: There were two Caspian Gulls, five Stonechats, a Pintail, 13 Snipe and four Jack Snipe. Neighbouring Ravensthorpe Reservoir had two Red-crested Pochards and a Little Gull.

PITSFORD RESERVOIR: Seventy Snipe, two Jack Snipe, two Yellow-legged Gulls and a Peregrine were seen.

OTHER SITES: A Scaup remained at Blatherwycke Lake. A Marsh Harrier was at Thrapston GP. There were 36 Snipe, two Jack Snipe and two Stonechats at Ditchford GP. Short-eared Owls were at Harrington Airfield, Blueberry Farm Maidwell, and between Hanging Houghton and Cottesbrooke, where there was also a Merlin. Two Jack Snipe were at Stanwick GP. Two more and a Woodcock were at Barnes Meadow. The Ruddy Shelduck remained at Winwick Pools.

Bob Bullock (01604 627 262)

NOTTINGHAMSHIRE

HIGHLIGHTS: A Dartford Warbler at Rufford Pit Top (27th), was the second Notts record. A Glossy Ibis was at Langford Lowfields (27th).

OTHER SITES: The Scaup remained at Attenborough. Holme Pierrepont had three Scaup and four Smew. Two Smew were at Collingham and one at Lound. Five White-fronted Geese were at Lound, five at Girton, and singles at Holme Pierrepont and Hoveringham. Up to 300 Whooper Swans were around the Carrlands. Two Bewick's Swans were there, with nine at Girton. Mediterranean Gulls were at Attenborough (5th) and King's Mill Reservoir (12th). More than 100 Bramblings were at Ollerton. Hawfinches included 22 at Clumber and 20 at Rufford.

Tom Shields

RUTLAND

HIGHLIGHTS: Rutland Water had four Common Scoters (1st), three Great Northern Divers, two Black-necked Grebes (from 13th) and a Slavonian Grebe all month.A Hen Harrier was near Lyddington (9th). A Hawfinch flew over Oakham (25th).

RUTLAND WATER: The count (16th) produced 10 Shelducks, six Mandarins, 102 Shovelers, 312 Gadwall, 1,677 Wigeon, 21 Pintails, 280 Teal, three Red-crested Pochards, 27 Pochards, 599 Tufted Ducks, three Scaup, 402 Goldeneyes, 81 Little Grebes, 63 Great Crested Grebes, seven Great White Egrets and 639 Coots.There were two Barnacle Geese (23rd) and a Smew (21st-22nd).Waders included two Avocets, 14 Oystercatchers, 768 Lapwings, 10 Curlews, two Black-tailed Godwits, a Green Sandpiper and five Redshanks.A Marsh Harrier was seen (15th). Barn Owls were regular.Five Stonechats were at Egleton.

OTHER SITES: Fort Henry Ponds had 52 Gadwall, 117 Wigeon, 45 Tufted Ducks, and a Little Egret (9th). Banthorpe had 250 Linnets (11th), with two Red-crested Pochards and two Little Egrets (27th). A Great White Egret was in Exton Park (1st-23rd).The Exton roost had up to 35 Red Kites. Ten were near Pickworth (20th). A Woodcock was in Tunneley Wood (23rd). A Barn Owl was at Exton (13th). A Peregrine was on Oakham Church. A Marsh Tit was in Tunneley Wood (22nd).

Terry Mitcham

STAFFORDSHIRE

HIGHLIGHTS: Belvide Reservoir had up to two Smew (1st-17th), and a Tundra Bean Goose with five Pink-footed Geese (28th), plus White-fronted Goose (8th-9th). Two Tundra Bean Geese were at Patshull Great Pool (17th). The Great Grey Shrike continued to show around Sherbrook Valley, Cannock Chase, on and off all month. A Black Redstart was at Pendeford Mill NR (1st-14th). Westport Lake had a Scaup, with one at Ford Green NR (23rd). Four Avocets were at Branston GP (23rd-24th). A Firecrest was at Iverley. Aqualate Park had a Garganey. The Slavonian Grebe remained at Whitemoor Haye. Chasewater had a Great Northern Diver (17th). A Red-headed Merganser was at Rudyard Reservoir (20th-28th), plus a Long-tailed Duck (21st). Hawfinches were at Codsall, Cannock Chase, Abbots Bromley, Trentham and Ingestre.

WARWICKSHIRE

HIGHLIGHTS: Draycote Water had the long-staying Red-throated Diver all month, plus visits from Common Scoter and up to two Smew, with the gull roost including Caspian and Glaucous at times. Ladywalk NR had 23 White-fronted Geese (2nd-7th). Brandon Marsh NR had a White-fronted Goose (6th-13th), and up to two Smew (21st-24th). A Hawfinch was at Studley Church (2nd).

WEST MIDLANDS

MARSH LANE: The Bittern remained throughout. A Knot was an unusual. There were 14 White-fronted Geese, a Jack Snipe, Green Sandpiper, Brambling, Great White Egret, three Egyptian Geese and two Shelducks.

SANDWELL VALLEY: Caspian Gulls were regular visitors. Three Whooper Swans flew over. There was a Shelduck, six Goldeneyes, two Curlews and two Barn Owls.

OTHER SITES: Up to four Caspian Gulls and a Mediterranean Gull roosted at Bartley. An Iceland Gull was seen occasionally atStubbers Green. A Ring Ouzel was a very early migrant in a Pelsall garden. A Black Redstart was in Birmingham city centre. Sutton Park held 14 Mandarins. A Red Kite flew over Smethwick.

Pete Hackett (0121 358 2454)

WALES

Highlights

In association with Rare Bird Alert

The most extraordinary find of the month was a White Tern picked up exhausted at Llanberis, Caernarfon, on 26th, and taken into care (where it later died). If accepted, it will be a first for the UK as well as the Western Palearctic.

ANGLESEY

HIGHLIGHTS: Cors Ddyga had 12 Greenland Whitefronts, 400 Pinkfeet, five Whooper Swans, a Great White Egret, four Bitterns, three Marsh Harriers, a Hen Harrier, Red Kite, Water Rail, Jack Snipe, 750 Golden Plovers, 100 Black-tailed Godwits, five Ruff, a Kingfisher and Cetti's Warbler. The Inland Sea had two Black-necked Grebes, two Slavonian Grebes, a Great Northern Diver, Long-tailed Duck, two Scaup and a Merlin. Five Cattle Egrets were at Llanfwrog. There were 28 Eiders at Penmon.

The Alaw Estuary had 319 pale-bellied Brent Geese, 283 Wigeon, 44 Pintails, four Cattle Egrets, 71 Grey Plovers, 132 Ringed Plovers, 473 Lapwings, 53 Bar-tailed Godwits, 62 Knot, 146 Dunlin, two Greenshanks, a Green Sandpiper and two Mediterranean Gulls. Valley Wetlands had a Red-necked Grebe, Scaup, Great White Egret, Hen Harrier, Marsh Harrier, Merlin, Bittern and Woodcock. Llyn Maelog had a Marsh Harrier, 27 Goosanders, 21 Goldeneyes, a Scaup and 11 Snipe.

South Stack had three Red-throated Divers, a Marsh Harrier, Merlin, two Jack Snipe, six Snipe, a Black Redstart and Hooded Crow. Red Wharf Bay had 14 Red-throated Divers, 200 Common Scoters, a Velvet Scoter, Long-tailed Duck and Little Gull. Two Hawfinches were at Plas Newydd.

Ken Croft

CARMARTHENSHIRE

HIGHLIGHTS: Thirty Chiffchaffs, three Siberian Chiffchaffs, an Eastern-race Chiffchaff and Firecrest were at Kidwelly STW throughout. Two Surf Scoters were at Pendine (2nd). A Sandwich Tern was at Pembrey Harbour (16th). Six Sand Martins were at Sandy Water Park (23rd). A Little Gull was at Kidwelly Quay (24th), moving to Sandy Water Park (25th) and Loughor Bridge (27th).

KIDWELLY: The marsh had a Hen Harrier (26th) and five Water Pipits. The quay had 88 Snipe, a Water Pipit (3rd), and eight Red-breasted Mergansers (17th). A Blackcap was at the sewage works (26th).

WWT LLANELLI WETLANDS: There was a Spotted Redshank, nine Spoonbills, a Hen Harrier (5th), and four White-fronted Geese (from 28th).

OTHER SITES: A Ring-necked Duck was at Talley lakes (5th). Goldeneyes were at Ash Pits Lake all month, and Sandy Water Park (to 26th). A Hen Harrier was at Pembrey Burrows (1st). There were 600 Sanderling (1st) and 130 Turnstones (24th) at Pembrey Harbour. Seventeen White-fronted Geese were in the Llangennech area (22nd-23rd), with up to 48 Whooper Swans in the Tywi

Glossy Ibis,
Rhuddlan Nature Reserve, Denbighshire,
9 February

PAUL BREWSTER

Valley. Two Mandarins were at Llyn Lech Owain (28th).
John Davis (johndaviswalesbirds@gmail.com)

CEREDIGION

YNYS-HIR: There was an Avocet (1st-6th), Hen Harrier (6th), two Whooper Swans and two Water Pipits (16th), 10 Greenland White-fronted Geese, three Marsh Harriers, five Goldeneyes and a Green Sandpiper. A Common Sandpiper was at Glandyfi (28th).
YNYSLAS: There were 192 Pintails (8th), a Marsh Harrier (16th), six Brent Geese (23rd) and 50 Common Scoters (27th). Cors Fochno had three Marsh Harriers, two Hen Harriers and a Merlin (1st), with three Hen Harriers (24th).
OTHER SITES: Cors Caron had 110 Wigeon (3rd), two Jack Snipe (11th), a Hen Harrier (20th) and Merlin (22nd). Two Goldeneyes were at Llyn Eiddwen. A Cattle Egret was at the Teifi Estuary (2nd). A Firecrest was at Aberystwyth (3rd). There were 1,600 Lapwings and a Whooper Swan at Ty Gwyn pools (12th). A Short-eared Owl was at Ystumtuen (18th).
John Davis (johndaviswalesbirds@gmail.com)

EAST GLAMORGAN

HIGHLIGHTS: The American Wigeon at Kenfig, Ring-necked Duck at Lisvane Reservoir, Velvet Scoter off Cardiff Foreshore and two Scaup at Cardiff Bay were present throughout. Three Caspian Gulls and 20 Yellow-legged Gulls were around Cardiff Bay. Siberian Chiffchaffs remained at Burrows Well and Merthyr Mawr Warren. A Black-throated Diver was at Llanishen Reservoir at the start of the month.

Marsh Harriers were at Rumney Great Wharf and Kenfig. Ogmore Estuary had a Water Pipit, three dark-bellied Brent Geese, a Merlin and Common Sandpiper. Two Short-eared Owls were at Old Castle Down. The first Sand Martin was at Flemingston Moor (24th). Two Firecrests were at Boverton Brook. Black Redstarts were at Cardiff City Hall and Southerndown. A Hawfinch was at Cosmeston.
Paul Roberts

GWENT

HIGHLIGHTS: A Great White Egret was at Newport Wetlands (22nd).
OTHER SITES: A Hen Harrier was on Mynydd Llangatwg (13th). Newport Wetlands had over 300 Black-tailed Godwits (15th), a Spotted Redshank and three Avocets (from 20th), and several sightings of Marsh Harriers. Goshawks displayed at a number of sites. Red Kites were back on territory. Long-eared Owls called from established breeding sites.
Chris Hatch

RADNORSHIRE

WYE VALLEY: Glasbury/Llowes held three Whooper Swans, 26 Mute Swans, 14 Herons, two Oystercatchers, 14 Snipe, a Water Rail, Kestrel, two Kingfishers, 65 Black-headed Gulls, 35 Redwings, 14 Pied Wagtails, 12 Goosanders, six Mandarins, 45 Wigeon, eight Little Egrets, a Great White Egret, 110 Teal and 160 Mallards. Pwll Patti Had 65 Wigeon, seven Little Egrets, 75 Canada Geese, 45 Teal, 60 Mallards, three Coots, two Pintails, two Gadwall, a Little Grebe, Moorhen, Green Sandpiper and Peregrine.

Little Egrets were at Newbridge, Llanelwedd (three) and Builth Road. Mandarins included 14 at Boughrood, four at Brynwern Bridge, two at Newbridge and four at Llanwrthwl.
OTHER SITES: Llyn Heilyn held six Jack Snipe, 65 Snipe, a Water Rail, four Little Grebes, 45 Teal, 12 Tufted Ducks, 28 Canada Geese, seven Coots, 54 Wigeon, 10 Mallards, five Goosanders, two Moorhens, four Little Grebes, two Mute Swans, a Curlew, Oystercatcher, Reed Bunting and Peregrine. Crossbills were at Dol y Mynach (six), Radnor Forest (28), Abbey Cwmhir (four) and Bwlch y Sarnau (four).

Llandrindod Lake held 64 Mallards, 11 Moorhens, a Herring Gull, Little Egret, Heron, Cormorant, seven Tufted Ducks, a Marsh Tit, Water Rail, six Reed Buntings, six Goosanders and 16 Mute Swans. Hindwell Pool held 28 Canada Geese, 12 Coots, 16 Little Grebes, 12 Tufted Ducks, six Mallards, two Mute Swans, two Moorhens, a Green Sandpiper, six Lapwings, 45 Redwings, 30 Fieldfares and 650 Starlings.

Tree Sparrows were at Llangunllo and New Radnor. A Hawfinch came to a Knighton bird-table. Hen Harriers were at Elan Valley, Gilwern, Aberedw Hill and Ireland Moor. Golden Plovers included 320 at The Begwyns, 80 at Hergest Ridge, 45 at St Harmon, 12 in Elan Valley, 30 at Red Hill and 12 at Gwaunceste.
Pete Jennings (radnorshirebirds@hotmail.com)

NORTH WEST

Highlights

In association with

The wintering first-winter Penduline Tit was still at Woolston Eyes NR, Cheshire, and a Red-breasted Goose was again reported around the Solway Firth, at Burgh Marsh on 9th.

CHESHIRE

HIGHLIGHTS: The drake Green-winged Teal remained on Sandbach Flashes (1st-14th). An adult Kumlien's Gull was at Widnes (1st-8th).

WOOLSTON EYES: Ringing activities on No1 bed included Great Tit, Long-tailed Tit, Reed Bunting, Jay, Goldcrest, Coal Tit, Robin and Blue Tit. Sightings included a Shelduck, five Skylarks, a Snipe and 120 Linnets. No3 bed ringing team had Linnet, Goldcrest, Blue Tit, Greenfinch, Great Tit and Blackbird. Records included a Peregrine, four Egyptian Geese, a Great White Egret, 60 Redwings, two Bramblings, 70 Black-headed Gulls, two Oystercatchers, a Sand Martin, three Ravens and a Willow Tit.

No 4 bed records included a Penduline Tit, Yellow-legged Gull, three Woodcocks, a Mediterranean Gull, Golden Plovers, four Pintails, four Goldeneyes, 11 Common Gulls, six Marsh Harriers, a Redshank, Dunlin and Red Kite. The Wildfowl Count (16th) included 144 Shovelers, 507 Teal, 687 Tufted Ducks, 17 Water Rails, 11 Pintails, four Woodcocks, three Kingfishers, 132 Pochards, 239 Gadwall and four Goldeneyes.

Dave Steel

CUMBRIA

HIGHLIGHTS: The female Ring-necked Duck remained at Longtown (1st-16th). Burgh Marsh had a Red-breasted Goose (9th), and a Todd's Canada Goose was at Rockcliffe Marsh (9th) where there were up to eight White-fronted Geese (8th-14th) and a Spoonbill. A Scaup was at Talkin Tarn (6th). A Long-tailed Duck was at Halforth. Two Cranes were at Wedholme Flow (16th). A Shag was at Windermere (1st-2nd), with a Great Northern Diver there late in the month. A Hen Harrier was at Wedholme Flow (8th-13th), joined by another (19th), with one at Park End Moss (9th). A Water Pipit was at Brigsteer (8th), with two at Burgh Marsh (16th). A Siberian Chiffchaff was at Dalston (24th). Walney Island had Hooded Crow and Short-eared Owl. Hawfinches were at Sizergh Castle.

GREATER MANCHESTER

HIGHLIGHTS: A Great Skua was at Heaton Park Reservoir (9th-10th). Two Cranes flew over Salford (2nd). Two Russian White-fronted Geese were at Etherow CP (16th) and Dunham Massey (18th).

ELTON RESERVOIR: There was the first county Sand Martin (25th), a Scaup (1st-2nd) and Mediterranean Gull.

MERSEY VALLEY: A Marsh Harrier was at Sale WP (25th).

PENNINGTON FLASH: There was a Hawfinch (6th), Caspian Gulls (15th-17th and 20th), two Great White Egrets, a Yellow-legged Gull and two Mediterranean Gulls.

OTHER SITES: A Caspian Gull (10th-27th) and Iceland Gull (10th-18th) were on Heaton Park Reservoir. An Iceland Gull was at High Rid Reservoir (18th-19th). A Caspian Gull was at Gorton on and off. A Green Sandpiper was at Cutacre CP (2nd). Three Egyptian Geese were at Daisy Nook CP. Audenshaw Reservoirs had a Smew all month, an Iceland Gull (9th-10th), Avocets (8th and 19th), a Caspian Gull, and two Red-breasted Mergansers. Manchester Mosslands had two Marsh Harriers.

Dr Paul Brewster

LANCASHIRE AND NORTH MERSEYSIDE

EAST LANCASHIRE: Visible migration minima from Darwen included 13,600 Woodpigeons, 750 Starlings, 400 Redwings, Fieldfares and Pinkfeet, 300 Lapwings, 70 Jackdaws, 60 Oystercatchers, 50 Chaffinches, Goosanders and Goldfinches, 40 Cormorants and Blackbirds, 30 Common Scoters, Greylags, Crossbills, Siskins, Long-tailed Tits and Mistle Thrushes, 20 Skylarks, Ravens, Snipe, Curlews, Great Black-backed Gulls, Song Thrushes and Rooks, and fewer than 10 Buzzards, Mediterranean Gulls, Woodcocks, Goldeneyes, Teal and Whooper Swans. There was a Great White Egret (25th)

Mavis Smith

NORTH LANCASHIRE

HIGHLIGHTS: Leighton Moss had a Ring-necked Duck throughout, and two very early Sand Martins (26th). A Great Northern Diver was at Pine Lake (to 10th). Two Bewick's Swan remained in the Thurnham area.

HEYSHAM/MORECAMBE: A Common Scoter was present in the first week, with two (8th). The Scaup remained (to 27th). Pale-bellied Brent Geese peaked at 51. A Shag was off Heysham (18th and 21st). Two Mediterranean Gulls were along Imperial Road (20th). A Sanderling was off Potts Corner (16th). Five Stonechats included two at Sunny Slopes during the first half of the month. The Stock Dove roost at Middleton included 58 (3rd). A Green Sandpiper was seen several times nearby.

LEIGHTON MOSS: There was a Spotted Redshank throughout, and up to 11 Great White Egrets. Ten Twite were at Bolton-le-Sands (25th). A Mediterranean Gull at Silverdale was unusual for this time of year (1st).

LUNE ESTUARY/NORTH FYLDE: There were only a few Pinkfeet. Cattle Egrets included three north of Glasson, and at least 10 in the Gulf Lane area. Mediterranean Gulls were at Blea Tarn (2nd) and Glasson (4th). Water Pipits were at Aldcliffe and Cockersands (2nd), and Stodday (3rd). Twite at Pilling Lane Ends peaked at 53. A Spotted Redshank was around Glasson. Seventeen Avocets were at Conder Pool. The Melling Whooper Swan herd remained consistent at 77. A Chiffchaff was in Lancaster (5th).

OTHER SITES: A Waxwing was at Abbeystead (21st)

Pete Marsh

NORTH EAST

Highlights

In association with

An Eastern Yellow Wagtail stayed from 19th to the end of the month in a ploughed field at Winteringham, Lincolnshire. January's Buff-bellied Pipit stayed on at Ross Bank Sands, Northumberland to 10th.

LINCOLNSHIRE

HIGHLIGHTS: The county's first Eastern Yellow Wagtail was at Winteringham (19th-28th). A Richard's Pipit was at Goxhill Haven (23rd). Up to five Tundra Bean Geese were at Anderby Creek (14th). The Ring-necked Duck remained at Tallington Lakes 16th). Two Shore Larks were at Mablethorpe (12th). A Smew was at Whisby Quarry (from 23rd). Two Glossy Ibises remained around Deeping Lakes.

GIBRALTAR POINT: There was a Hen Harrier (1st), two Water Pipits (2nd), two Great Northern Divers (3rd), a Black-throated Diver (3rd), two Bearded Tits (5th and 12th), a Fulmar (17th), 22 White-fronted Geese (19th), a Black Brant (19th-21st), two Cranes (20th), a Spoonbill (23rd), Barnacle Goose (23rd), three Woodlarks (24th), a Puffin (27th), Raven (27th), and 25 Corn Buntings.

OTHER SITES: A Spotted Redshank was at Alkborough Flats (1st). Two Bewick's Swans were at Baston Fen (1st), with 10 at Freiston Shore (3rd). A Caspian Gull was at Huttoft Bank (1st). Ten White-fronted Geese were at Saltfleetby (3rd). Red-necked Grebes were at Sutton-on-Sea (3rd-13th), and past Anderby Creek (28th). A Hawfinch was at Belton House (4th-12th).

Black Redstarts were at Louth (5th-14th), and Sutton-on-Sea (6th). A Purple Sandpiper was at Cleethorpes (6th). An Iceland Gull was at Bagmoor Lake (8th). A Red-breasted Merganser was at Deeping Lakes (21st). A Siberian Chiffchaff was at Marston (25th). Two Scaup were at Frampton Marsh (from 25th).

Josh Hedley

NORTHUMBERLAND

HIGHLIGHTS: The American Pipit remained at Ross Back Sands (to 7th). The American Wigeon remained on the Blagdon Estate (2nd-25th), with another American Wigeon at Big Waters NR (22nd). Widdrington Moor Lake had up to three Smew, and there was one at Grindon Lough (19th-23rd), and one at East Chevington NWT (21st-24th). Howdon Wetland NR had a Green-winged Teal (19th). Druridge Bay CP had a Ring-necked Duck and up to two Scaup. A Glossy Ibis was at Druridge Pools (24th). Hedgeley GP had a Ring-necked Duck (10th-11th), as did Branton GP (16th). A Tundra Bean Goose was at High Hauxley (7th-12th), plus Pink-footed and White-fronted Geese, and Ruddy Shelduck. A drake Black Scoter was off Goswick (1st), plus Red-necked Grebe, Black-throated Diver, Slavonian Grebe and good numbers of Long-tailed Ducks.

EAST YORKSHIRE

FLAMBOROUGH: There was a Lapland Bunting (1st), Caspian Gull (4th), Great Northern Diver (5th), Mediterranean Gull (7th), Velvet Scoter (13th), Yellow-legged Gull (18th) and c25 Snow Buntings.

HORNSEA MERE: There was a Smew and Long-tailed Duck throughout, a Mediterranean Gull (1st), and Snow Bunting (14th).

OTHER SITES: Two Smew were at High Eske (2nd), with one at Brandesburton (3rd) and four at Tophill Low. A Caspian Gull was in Hull (4th), with two at Southfield Reservoir (24th). Two Twite were at Keyingham (7th). A Lapland Bunting was at Buckton (15th). A Hawfinch was at Fridaythorpe (17th). Blacktoft Sands had a Spoonbill (from 19th), and two Cranes (23rd). A Raven was at Bempton (22nd). North Cave Wetlands had a Great White Egret (23rd), three Ravens (24th) and a Black-necked Grebe (25th).

Ian Marshall (01482 627 446)

WEST YORKSHIRE

BRADFORD: The Red-necked Grebe remained at Leeshaw Reservoir. Silsden Reservoir had 10 Black-tailed Godwits (6th) and 52 Wigeon (22nd). An Iceland Gull was at Cullingworth (23rd). There were two Mandarins and seven Snipe at High Royd Scrape (3rd). A Jack Snipe was on Soil Hill (5th). Northcliffe Wood had 21 Ring-necked Parakeets (7th). Four Mandarins were at Burley (12th). Four Grey Partridges were at Leeshaw (17th).

Two Caspian Gulls were at Redcar Tarn and one at Lower Laithe Reservoir (21st). There were 40 Curlews at Otley (5th), 25 Oystercatchers at Chelker Reservoir (6th), two Ringed Plovers at Warley Moor Reservoir (20th) and over 200 Curlews at Silsden Ings (22nd). Chiffchaffs were at Shipley and Dowley Gap. A Blackcap was in a Bradford garden. Water Rails were at Keighley all month, and Apperley Bridge (5th).

Chris King (Bradford OG)

SCOTLAND

Highlights

In association with

Rare birds again included American Coot and Bufflehead on Mainland Shetland, where there was also a Ross's Goose. A Ross's Gull was seen at Ardivachar Point, South Uist, Outer Hebrides.

ARGYLL

TIREE: Loch Riaghain had a Little Egret (20th-21st) and a Coot (to 10th). A White-tailed Eagle roamed west Tiree (10th-26th). The Pochard remained at Loch a' Phuill. Mistle Thrushes were at Balephuil (20th-21st) and Vaul (21st). Tiree's first wintering Woodpigeon was at Balephuil (to 21st), with a Jack Snipe there (21st). There were 15 Goldfinches at Crossapol, a Greenfinch and Dunnock at Balephuil (2nd-15th), and an obvious return of Pied Wagtails at the month's end. Maxima included 240 Sanderling, 150 Ringed Plovers, 128 Turnstones, 42 Bar-tailed Godwits and six Woodcocks. Black-headed Gulls returned, with 12 (28th). The first three Lesser Black-backed Gulls were at Balephetrish Bay (20th). A dozen Fieldfares remained. Hundreds of Oystercatchers returned in the second half of the month. Eleven Long-tailed

Short-eared Owl,
Spalding, Lincolnshire,
5 March

MIKE WEEDON

Ross's Goose, Toft, Shetland, February

HUGH HARROP

Ducks remained at Hough Bay (27th). Loch Bhasapol had two Pintails (from 20th), and 20 Shovelers (10th),John Bowler (john.bowler@rspb.org.uk)

CENTRAL REGION

HIGHLIGHTS: There were one or two Marsh Harriers at Tullibody Inch (9th-26th). Twenty Hawfinches were at Holmehill. A White-tailed Eagle flew over Crianlarich (12th).

CLACKMANNANSHIRE: A Green Sandpiper was at Devonmouth Pool (2nd, 22nd and 27th). The Ring-necked Duck was at Gartmorn Dam (8th). A Little Egret, two Jack Snipe and a Woodcock were at Blackdevon Wetlands (12th). Tullibody Inch had 6,336 Pinkfeet, 1,005 Wigeon, a Bar-tailed Godwit and four Bearded Tits (13th). A Shelduck was on Alva Flood Pools (16th), when five Great Crested Grebes returned to Gartmorn Dam.

FALKIRK DISTRICT: A Shoveler was at Kinneil Woods (5th). Nine Rock Pipits were at Powfoulis (9th), with a Little Egret there (15th). Twenty Twite were at Higgin's Neuk (15th). A Water Rail, Jack Snipe and two Woodcocks were below Mungal (16th). Kinneil had 21 Scaup. Skinflats Pools had a Merlin (1st), a Little Egret and eight Pochards (9th), and a Marsh Harrier (15th).

STIRLING DISTRICT: Three Mandarins were at Doune Ponds. The Ring-necked Duck was on Airthrey Pond intermittently (to 23rd). Three Shovelers and a Green Sandpiper were on Devonmouth Pool (2nd). Three Gadwall were on Loch Watston (5th), when five Grey Partridges were on the Carse of Lecropt. Five Barnacle Geese were below Thornhill (7th). A Little Egret was at Kildean (16th). A Green Sandpiper was near Kinbuck (9th and 16th).

Two Shelducks were on Pendreich Pool (17th). Four Black Grouse were at Buckieburn Reservoir (28th).

UPPER FORTH ESTUARY: A co-ordinated count (16th) produced four Great Crested Grebes, a Little Egret, 292 Shelducks, 442 Wigeon, 671 Teal, 170 Pintails, 13 Scaup, an Eider, Long-tailed Duck, eight Red-breasted Mergansers, 84 Oystercatchers, 15 Ringed Plovers, 132 Lapwings, 26 Knot, 3,164 Dunlin, 186 Black-tailed Godwits, 146 Bar-tailed Godwits, 568 Curlews, 1,584 Redshanks, a Spotted Redshank and three Greenshanks.

Neil Bielby

LOTHIAN

HIGHLIGHTS: The White-winged Scoter off Gullane Point was joined by a second drake (from 16th). A flock of Hawfinches was reported from the Penicuik Estate (2nd), with at least one bird still there (3rd). A Bean Goose flew over Glenkinchie (9th). A Shore Lark was at Barns Ness (25th-28th).

ABERLADY: A Black-throated Diver was off Craigielaw Point (1st). There were 4,295 Eiders and 11,700 Common Scoters in Gullane Bay (2nd). The Whimbrel remained at Gullane Point, with a Red-necked Grebe there (5th), and two Great Northern Divers (2nd). There were 25 Twite (8th) and a Red Kite (19th).

GOSFORD BAY: A Mediterranean Gull was at Port Seton (5th), with a Jack Snipe at Seton Sands (7th). Gosford Bay held three Great Northern Divers (6th), a Red-necked Grebe (16th-18th), and four Mediterranean Gulls (18th). A Black Guillemot was off Ferny Ness (28th).

MUSSELBURGH: There was a Red-necked Grebe (6th-14th), Black-throated Diver (13th-14th), Snow Bunting (13th) and Mediterranean Gull (22nd).

OTHER SITES: A Great Northern Diver, Black-throated Diver, 27 Red-throated Divers, a Great Crested Grebe and 64 Long-tailed Ducks were at Scoughall (1st). A Short-eared Owl was at Yellowcraigs (1st). Two Twite were in the Penicuik Estate (3rd). A Little Egret was at Gladhouse and a Mediterranean Gull at Loanstone (26th). Ten Mandarins were at Pressmennan (16th). An early Sand Martin was at Dalmeny (25th).

Jim Nicholson

OUTER HEBRIDES

HIGHLIGHTS: A Ross's Gull was at Ardivachar/North Bay, South Uist (5th). The Lesser Scaup remained on Loch Bee, South Uist.

OTHER SITES: Green-winged Teal were at Loch Stiapabhat, Ardmhor, Loch nam Feithean, Howmore River and West Loch Ollay. The hybrid Mallard x Black Duck was again in Stinky Bay. The Ring-necked Duck was at Loch Tiumpan (11th). Four Velvet Scoters were off the Braigh, Stornoway (9th), with two there (11th). A Surf Scoter was at Balgarva (9th and 11th). Unseasonal Sooty Shearwaters were off Port of Ness (2nd), and the Butt of Lewis (three on 16th). Two Crossbills flew over South Galson (22nd).

A few Black-tailed Godwits were over-wintering South Uist/Benbecula. A Little Gull was seen occasionally from the north of Barra. Iceland Gulls included two at the Butt (1st), three at Port of Ness and Ardivachar (2nd), and singles at Fivepenny, Stinky Bay (6th) and Garrynamonie (8th). Glaucous Gulls included two at the Butt (2nd), and two at Rubh' Arnal (12th). Four Snow Buntings were at the Butt (6th), with 14 at Sollas (15th), one on Eriskay (26th) and 38 at Malacleit (28th).

Steve Duffield
(www.western-isles-wildlife.co.uk)

SHETLAND

HIGHLIGHTS: White-billed Divers were off South Nesting Bay (1st-28th), Gloup (17th), and from the Out Skerries ferry (28th). A Black-throated Diver was off Skeld (10th). The Ross's Goose remained at Scatsta (1st-13th), before relocating to Toft (24th-28th). The Green-winged Teal was seen sporadically at Semblister (to 21st). The American Wigeon and Bufflehead remained at Hillwell, as did the American Coot at Loch of Spiggie. Ten Iceland Gulls and just five Glaucous Gulls were reported. A Kumlien's Gull was at Uyeasound (1st-8th). A Hornemann's Redpoll was at Gluss (9th).

Hugh Harrop (www.shetlandwildlife.co.uk)

TAYSIDE

HIGHLIGHTS: Three White-fronted Geese were with Pink-footed Geese at Glamis (2nd). A Snow Goose was at Mains of Usan (2nd-6th), with it or another seen at Scurdie Ness (6th), and Montrose Basin (14th-15th). A Scaup was at Brechin (19th), with one at Balgavies Loch SWT (19th), and one at Loch of Kinnordy RSPB (28th). Montrose Basin had a Green-winged Teal (4th-5th).

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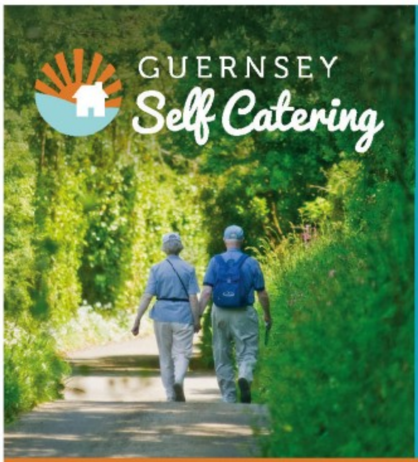

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Walking back into birding

Winning a nature walk in a charity auction sent **Teresa Tearle** on a birdwatching journey

My love of birds began with practices that are now considered outdated. As a child in suburban Bedford, with a small garden no bigger than a postage stamp, I found joy in watching finches – Bullfinches among them – flit around our red plastic net feeders. I also fed white bread to Starlings, House Sparrows, and the ducks and swans on the nearby river. At the age of 10, I even kept a diary, noting the birds I spotted each day.

Around this time, we visited my mother's family in the south-west of Ireland, where a trip to Mizen Head left an indelible mark on me. I watched in awe as hundreds of Gannets plunged into the ocean, and for the first time, I spotted a Curlew and a Cuckoo. I was smitten. Returning home, every country walk was a joy, and I even hopped on a bus to visit the nearby RSPB reserve at Sandy.

But life has a way of shifting priorities. At 16, I lost my mother, and in the years that followed, I threw myself into exams and my first job at 18. Visits to reserves like Slimbridge and the Nene Washes were precious, but nature, though always in my heart, took a back seat.

Many years later, life led me to the Isle of Wight, which to my delight I found to be a birdwatcher's paradise. Its mix of wetlands, coastlines, downs, and woodlands reignited my passion.

In the winter of 2022, during a local charity auction for the Red Squirrel Trust run by Debbie Hart, I 'won' a walk with Jim Baldwin, the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) Regional Representative. Our chilly January morning at RSPB Brading Marsh and Bembridge Harbour and Lagoons was an eye-opener. I spotted a range of wetland birds, including my first Snipe, Gadwall, and Marsh Harrier. Jim's enthusiasm was infectious, and before long, I joined the BTO and enrolled in their online ID courses. From songbirds to waders, raptors to gulls, I eagerly absorbed every bit of knowledge.

Wetlands are Teresa's happy place

TERESA TEARLE

The final course, focusing on counting birds and the Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS), coincided with my volunteer role at the National Trust's bird hide at Newtown National Nature Reserve. It felt like the perfect way to apply what I had learned, and I was soon a member of the Newtown WeBS team. As I gained experience, I was honoured to be offered the role of Regional Organiser for the Breeding Bird Survey (BBS), a position I've proudly held for three years. This year, I'm thrilled to be expanding my involvement by leading the Heathland Birds Survey.

I owe so much to Jim Baldwin for opening the door to my birding journey, and to the passionate community of 'nature nuts' on the Isle of Wight for their warm welcome and unwavering support. My passion – or 'mojo' – is back in full force, and I couldn't be more grateful for the opportunities that have come my way.

Her prize walk was an introduction to species such as Marsh Harrier

REMO SAVISAAR/ALAMY

Teresa is a passionate nature enthusiast with a lifelong love for birds. Now retired, Teresa has the opportunity to reconnect with the natural world. She dedicates much of her time to volunteering with the British Trust for Ornithology and the National Trust. A particular highlight of her volunteering is conducting surveys and guiding walks, a passion that allows her to share her deep knowledge of nature with others.

Want to tell us how you reignited your passion for birding? Email us at: birdwatching@bauermedia.co.uk and we'll tell you how.

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